1 DANGER forward

The Magazine Of The Big Red One, Vietnam

Vietnam Battles Part Two

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"Our defense is in the spirit which prized liberty as the heritage of all men, in all lands everywhere."

Abraham Lincoln, 1858

121st Signal Battalion

***25 AUGUST BATTLE:** Men of the 2d Battalion, 28th Infantry, move towards the Battle of Bong Trang.*

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DANGER forward

Volume One, Number Three—August 1967

Vietnam Battles Part Two

The Magazine Of The Big Red One, Vietnam

First Infantry Division
APO San Francisco 96345

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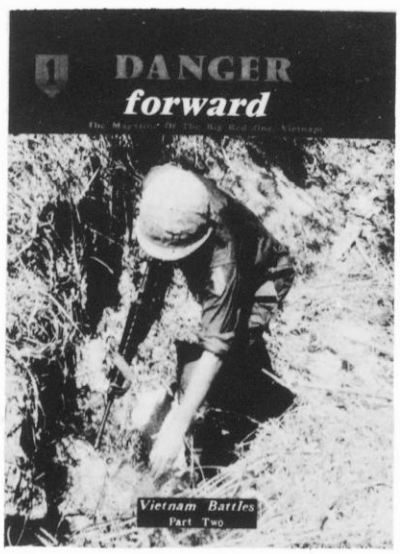

This issue of DANGER FORWARD is the second in a series featuring the major battles fought by the First Infantry Division in Vietnam. "Vietnam Battles-Part One," which was published in June 1967, covered accounts of the Division's first seven battles. "Vietnam Battles-Part Two" takes in Battles Eight through Thirteen. The next edition, to be published in October, will summarize the action in five more engagements and also include stories of current interest. To more fully tell the BIG RED ONE Story, articles, sketches and suggestions on topics for the magazine are always invited.

CPT Richard W. Flanagan
Editor

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(Front) A BIG RED ONE soldier searches for Viet Cong during the BATTLE of LOC NINH PLANTATION. Photograph by 121st Signal Battalion. (Back). The 2/18 Inf was heli-lifted by the 1st Aviation Battalion to a landing zone south of Hon Quan during the BATTLE of AP TAU O. Photograph taken by SSG Gerard Forken. Layout of the Cover was done by Koichi Ando, Tokyo, Japan.

DANGER FORWARD, an authorized publication of the US Army, provides timely, authoritative information of professional interest on combat operations, revolutionary development programs and combat support procedures of the First Infantry Division, Vietnam. It serves as a means of expression for views of the Commanding General and achieves command information objectives of the Department of the Army and the First Infantry Division. Material of interest to Division members and the Army in general is invited and should be mailed to: Editor, DANGER FORWARD, Information Office, First Infantry Division, APO 96345. Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of Department of the Army. The magazine is printed at Dai Nippon Printing Co., Ltd., Tokyo.

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Vietnam Battles—8

AP TAU O

On 8 June 1966, A Troop, 4th Cavalry, moves through Lai Khe enroute to Hon Quan. Just north of Chon Thanh, the lead vehicle hit a mine, halting the column. The BATTLE OF AP TAU O had started.

SFC Frank P. Castro

THE BATTLE OF AP TAU O was fought on the afternoon of 8 June 1966, some 85 miles north of Saigon, just south of Quan Loi and Hon Quan on National Highway 13.

As A Troop, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry (reinforced), was moving north on Highway 13, an air observer flying over the convoy spotted Viet Cong along the road. A Trp immediately engaged the enemy. It was 1440 hours and the cavalry unit had tied into what was later identified as the 272d Main Force VC Regiment, three battalions strong.

The battle occurred during the 1st Infantry Division's Operation EL PASO II—a massive search and destroy, road runner, airfield and basecamp security mission. It began 2 June 1966, and concentrated on an extensive area north of Saigon in Binh Long Province and portions of Phouc Long Province.

On 8 June the operation for A Trp had begun as a road clearing mission from Phu Loi along Highway 13, through Lai Khe and on to Hon Quan, which is situated just to the southwest of Quan Loi.

Elements of the 2d Battalion, 18th Infantry, commanded By LTC Herbert J. McChrystal Jr., had been moved to Lai Khe as a rapid reaction force and subsequent to the column's passage through Lai Khe, the battalion closed at Quan Loi to assume the rapid reaction mission from that location.

Meanwhile, the convoy progressed without incident through Lai Khe and continued toward Hon Quan. Just north of Chon Thanh, the lead vehicle hit a mine, halting the column. Waves of enemy infantry attacked the column from both sides of the road, employing the traditional VC technique of a brief firefight with maximum firepower.

The 272d Regt was in position to the west of Highway 13 with its 1st, 2d and 3d Battalions aligned north to south. The 1st and 2d Battalions were primarily engaged, while the 3d Bn to the south of the battle area had engaged the cavalry trail party.

When Private First Class Avery G. Smith's tank took a mortar hit that disabled it, he voluntarily left his position as loader and climbed out of the turret onto the back deck to defend his vehicle.

Throughout the battle, the Russell Springs, Ky., native fought off repeated attacks as the Viet Cong tried to overrun his tank. During the heaviest hours of fighting, PFC Smith remained exposed as he protected his tank and other vehicles nearby. Even after suffering painful facial wounds, he continued to fight, often engaging the enemy at point blank range.

Finally, all the vehicle's weapons became inoperative and it was Smith's efforts alone that saved it from being taken.

When the tank took its fourth direct mortar hit, PFC Smith absorbed the brunt of the explosion, thus saving the lives of at least two of his fellow crewmen. He was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

As the tanks and armored personnel carriers (APCS) poured a heavy and steady stream of fire into the enemy, artillery and air strikes pounded the Viet Cong. Forty-three

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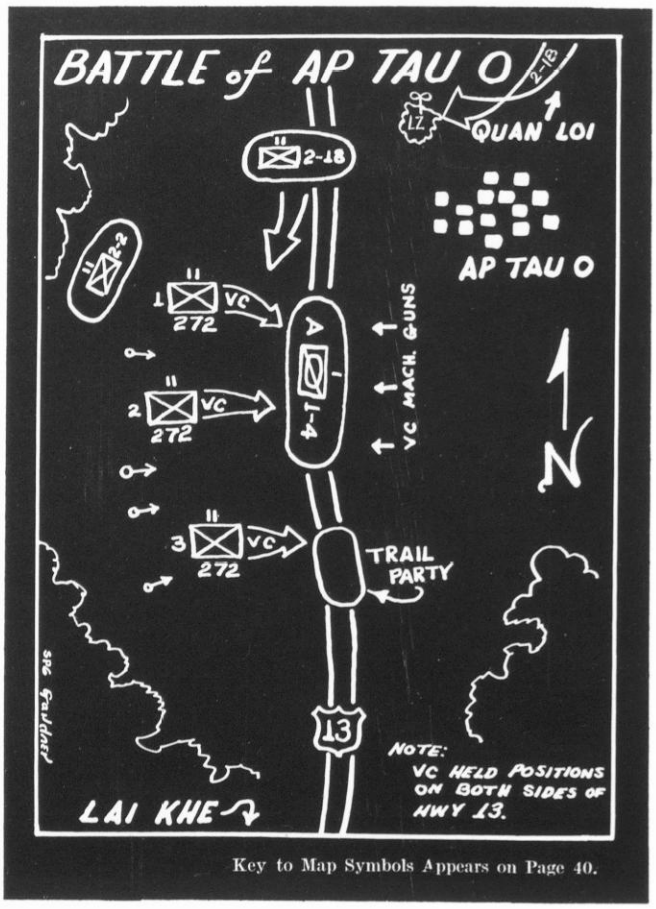
SP4 John C. Grove

AP TAU O: Men of the 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry, keep an eye out for the Viet Cong as they move toward Highway 13, scene of an attack by three Viet Cong battalions on A Troop of the 4th Cav, 8 June 1966.



Key to Map Symbols Appears on Page 40.

sorties were logged in by Air Force fighter bombers. After the size of the enemy force was determined, the 2d Bn, 18th Inf, was committed to the battle.

The 2/18 Inf was heli-lifted to a landing zone south of Hon Quan and it proceeded to sweep south along Highway 13, attacking the northern VC flank and disrupting the enemy's attack.

Specialist 4 Wayne C. Stone, Columbia, S.C., was an assistant machinegunner in A Co, 2/18 Inf, moving to assist the engaged cavalry troop.

As his unit moved through the terrain spotted with dense growth, it encountered a VC force that opened fire from three directions. Taking defensive positions, the infantrymen began fighting back.

When the Viet Cong threatened to overrun the position and capture a machinegun and several hundred rounds of ammunition, Specialist Stone volunteered to rescue the ordnance.

Racing some 50 yards through heavy small arms fire and flying mortar fragments, he came to within 25 feet of the Viet Cong. Gathering the weapon and ammo, Stone made a frantic dash for cover and was within a few feet of it when he fell, a large chunk of metal lodged in his back.

Specialist Stone spent nearly two months in a hospital recuperating from the wound that almost crippled him. For his actions, he was awarded the Bronze Star Medal with "V" (Valor) device.

Specialist 4 Edward L. Guilliams, Hampton, Va., was serving as a crew member on an armored personnel carrier (APC) which had taken hits that inflicted casualties. Specialist Guilliams gave first aid to his comrades and continued fighting, even when the only available weapons were a .45 caliber pistol and a M-79 grenade launcher. When the APC'S radio became inoperative, he voluntarily exposed himself to heavy fire to pass on messages.

Later, Specialist Guilliams risked death to gather and redistribute ammunition. He also was awarded the Bronze Star with "V" device.

The battle raged from 1440 hours until 1930 hours along a road bordered by thick jungle on either side and was at the onset of the yearly monsoon season—the season during which the enemy hopes and plans for massive offensives and victory.

When the division troops, now reinforced by the 2d Battalion, 2d Infantry, under the command of LTC Jack L. Conn, swept the battlefield, they counted, among the enemy dead, the commander of the 1st Bn, 272d Regt. On his body they found a document on which was sketched an ambush plan—an ambush that had been foiled by the BIG RED ONE. The Viet Cong suffered a total of 93 killed in action; whereas, US casualties amounted to only 13 KIA and 38 WIA.

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Vietnam Battles—9

Loc ninh plantation

AT LOC NINH: Members of A Company, 2d Battalion, 28th Infantry, move out on a heliborne assault. The original mission, to clear an area around the village of Loc Thien on the Loc Ninh Plantation, was altered when blocking elements of the company further south began receiving fire from Viet Cong entrenched on HILL 150.

121st Signal Battalion

THE BATTLE OF LOC NINH PLANTATION took place under a canopy of rubber trees in a gently rolling plantation northwest of Loc Ninh, some 90 miles north of Saigon. During the bitter fighting, BIG RED ONE troops conducted determined and repeated assaults, finally succeeding in their efforts to overrun a large VC main force in heavily fortified positions. The battle took place 11 June 1966, while the 2d Battalion, 28th Infantry, commanded by LTC Kyle W. Bowie, was taking part in Operation EL PASO II.

The action began as elements of A Company, 2d Bn, 28th Inf, departed from the Loc Ninh area at 0715 hours, heading northwest to form a ground blocking force for a heliborne assault by other elements of A Co and a (CIDG) Vietnamese force.

As the force headed for its blocking positions to the northwest, it came under fire from HILL 150 at 0735 hours. Immediately, 81 mm mortars were directed into the area. Following the mortar barrage, the two blocking platoons moved southeast into positions east of the VC force on the hill.

Meanwhile, after their initial landing, the heliborne elements headed south toward their original objective of clearing the area in the vicinity of the village of Loc Thien

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on the Loc Ninh Plantation. When the blocking force made contact again at 0849 hours, the heliborne troops altered their mission and moved to assist the men in contact with an estimated VC platoon entrenched atop HILL 150.

When A Co's heliborne platoon and the platoon of CIDGs linked up with the blocking elements, a U-shaped formation was deployed around the hill with the opening to the northwest. The CIDG force attempted to penetrate the VC position from this direction but was repulsed by heavy small arms and automatic weapons fire. Immediately, 81 mm mortars were called in to the north, sealing off any VC route of withdrawal.

Captain Raymond V. Blanford, South Bend, Ind., the commander of A Co, repeatedly exposed himself to intense enemy fire to direct artillery fire on the VC emplacements. He then led his force in an assault on the VC position. Meeting increased fire from the enemy, Captain Blanford halted the advance and called in more artillery fire. Coordinating the attack with precision, he mounted another assault. As the captain advanced up the hill in the wake of exploding rounds, he was seriously wounded in the right eye. Despite intense pain, Captain Blanford refused medical evacuation and continued to direct his men. Although this attack was later stalled, he was awarded the Silver Star Medal for his heroic action.

In Loc Ninh, C Co was alerted at 1010 hours to come to the assistance of A Co. As C Co moved on foot to tie in with its sister company, VC forces were reported to be moving to the northwest toward HILL 177. Artillery and 4.2-inch mortar fire were called in on the company positions, while the Reconnaissance Platoon was dispatched from Loc Ninh to support C Co and resupply it. Also, at 1215 hours, two helicopter-loads of ammunition resupply were airdropped on C Co's position.

The Recon Platoon killed three VC snipers before linking up with C Co at 1330 hours and prepared for an assault on the enemy position atop HILL 177. In preparation for the attack, more artillery was called in on the hill. The assault began at 1425 hours with C Co on line east to west and the Recon Plat pinching in on the enemy trenchwork from the west along a ridgeline running north. The Viet Cong retaliated with intensive fire and grenades.

Private First Class Tim A. Noe, Redlands, Calif., was in C Co when the sweep began up the hill. When the Viet Cong opened fire, PFC Noe and his comrades in C Co and the Recon Plat rushed forward to a seemingly abandoned trench, the only cover in the area. The enemy anticipated the move and had positioned a machinegun at one end of the trench. This fire took a heavy toll of the assaulting infantrymen. The Viet Cong threw a barrage of grenades and attempted to surround the BIG RED ONE troops.

One grenade rolled into the position occupied by PFC Noe and his machinegun crew, approximately 25 meters from the enemy position. Although wounded, Noe was trying to cover the withdrawal of the other members of his crew. As the grenade rolled into the trench, he threw himself over the blast, saving the lives of those around him. PFC Noe was posthumously awarded the Silver Star Medal for his action.

The Silver Star was also posthumously awarded to Specialist 4 Kenneth A. Babb, Suffolk, Va., who was killed while administering first aid to the men of C Co and the Recon Plat.

At this point, the Viet Cong concentrated their fire on the Recon Plat and C Co on the left flank by hurling grenades and firing small arms. The enemy also stepped up their fires on the right flank.

The Recon Plat attempted to fall back to prevent the enemy envelopment movement. During this time the Viet Cong moved a machinegun into a trench occupied by the remaining Recon elements, resulting in the enemy overrunning the position. C Co immediately counterattacked and with its reserve platoon captured HILL 177.

SP4 Phil Stitt

"BLACK LIONS": A soldier of the 2d Battalion, 28th Infantry, moves south where he and his unit will link up with the blocking elements and form a U-shaped formation around Hill 150.

During the fierce fighting, the Viet Cong were driven off the hill and into the waiting fires of the artillery to the north and northwest. The firing in this area subsided by 1615 hours.

Meanwhile, to the south of HILL 177, consecutive assaults from the north, south and west had failed to dislodge the Viet Cong from their positions on HILL 150. A CIDG company moving west on patrol was diverted into blocking positions, while A Co's 81 mm mortars continued to pound the enemy location.

The battalion commander then committed his final reserve, B Company, at 1430 hours and moved the CIDG force to a more advantageous position. When B Co linked up with A Co at 1500 hours, elements of the latter company

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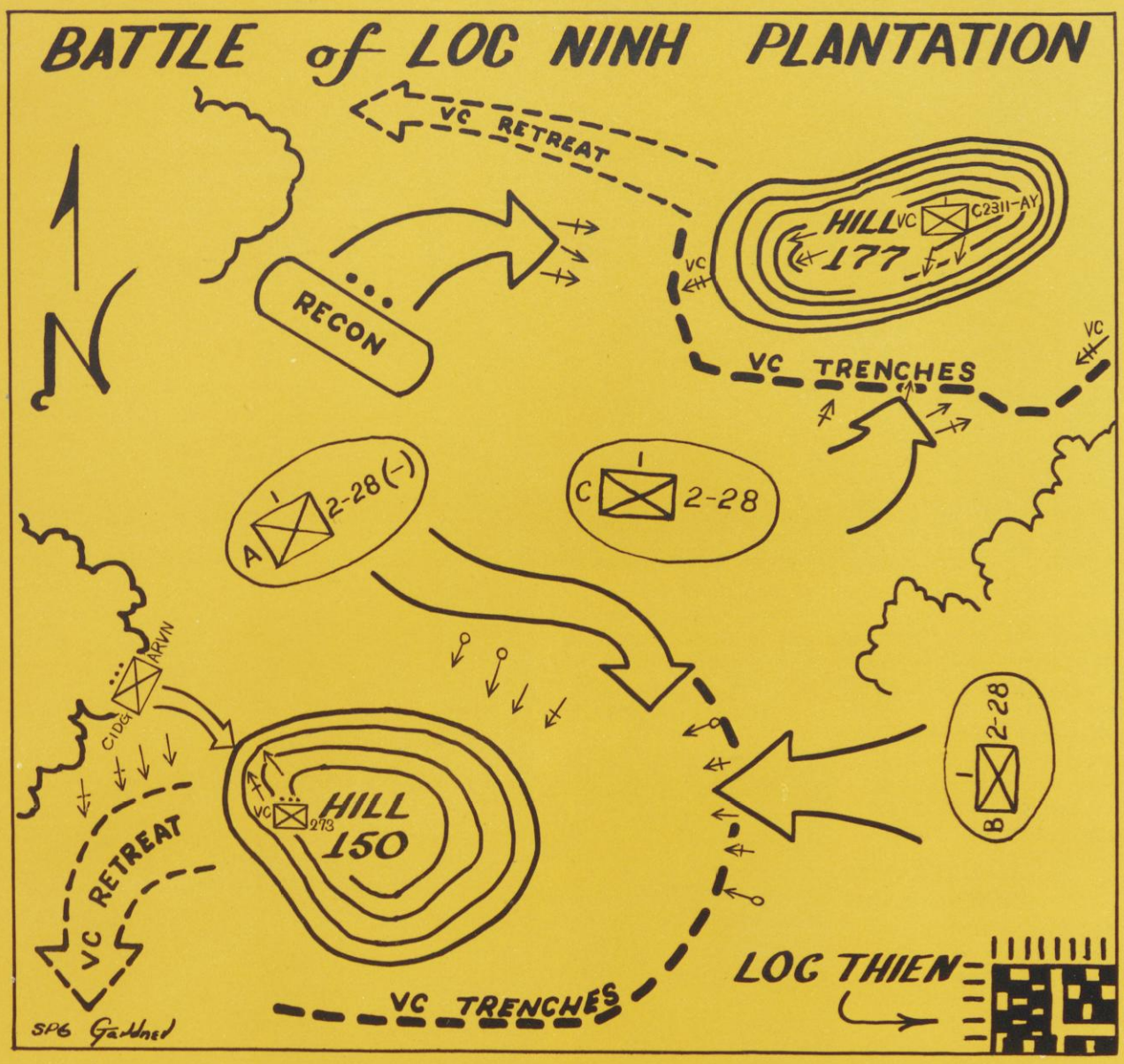

Key to Map Symbols Appears on Page 40.

were repositioned to allow the artillery to bombard the hill prior to another assault.

Following the barrage, B Co assaulted HILL 150 at 1630 hours. The charging infantrymen succeeded in overrunning the enemy positions and the Viet Cong fled to the south, running into a heavy volume of fire from the CIDG blocking force. From here they scattered to the southwest in complete disorganization. The men of the 2/28 Inf accounted for 98 enemy killed and one captured during the battle. US casualties were 33 killed and 33 wounded.

CPT Leonard Schodowski
145th Aviation Battalion

CIDG FORCE: A CIDG company moving west on patrol was diverted into blocking postions. When the VC retreated they ran head-on into the blocking force and came under heavy fire.

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▲ *HELP ARRIVES: Reinforcements for the 2d Battalion, 28th Infantry, move to aid fellow "Black Lions" during the Battle of Loc Ninh Plantation.*

ILLUSTRATOR KOICHI ANDO ▶

▼ *HITTING THE HILL: Three members of C Company, 2d Battalion, 28th Infantry, await the order to attack entrenched Viet Cong on HILL 177.*

SP4 Ray Pezzoli

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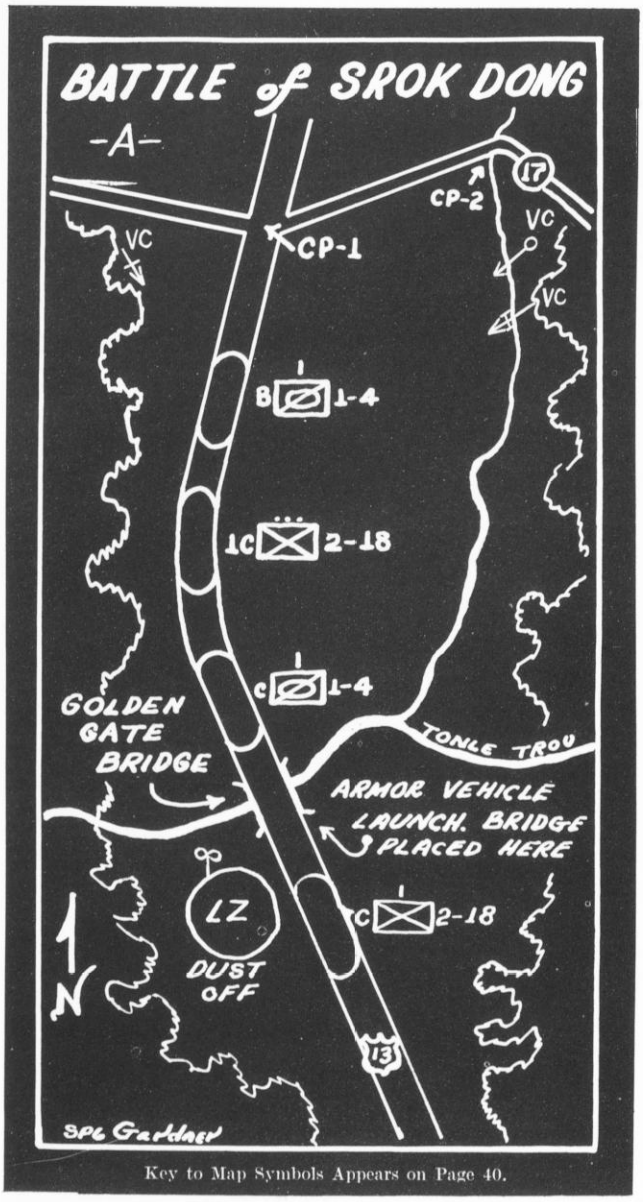
Vietnam Battles—10

SROK DONG



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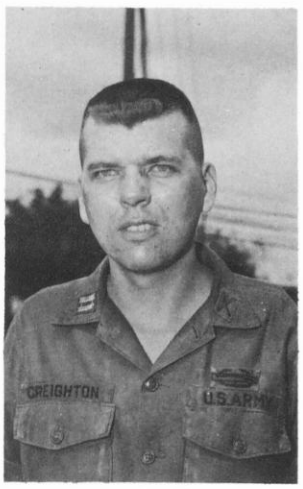
By CPT George E. Creighton
Division Historian

ON 30 JUNE 1966, DURING Operation EL PASO II, the 271st Viet Cong Regiment suffered a defeat when it attempted to ambush elements of the 1st Infantry Division near the village of Srok Dong. Elements of the division involved in the ambush were B and C Troops, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry, and the 1st Platoon of C Company, 2d Battalion, 18th Infantry.



CPT Creighton

These units were to cross Check Point *Golden Gate* (at which point an armored vehicle launch bridge [AVLB] was to be put across a stream to replace a damaged bridge) and proceed north along National Highway 13, conducting a reconnaissance in force. The purpose of the troop movement was to deceive the enemy as to the actual area in which the division was planning to operate in the future on the Minh Thanh Road. B and C Trps, 1st Sqdn, 4th Cav, were expected to return to Hon Quan by 1930 hours on 30 June.

On 30 June, B Trp with the 1st Plat of C Co, 2d Bn, 18th Inf, attached and an AVLB departed Hon Quan and established a bridge crossing at 0859 hours. A Company, 2/18 Inf, remained at Hon Quan as a reaction force. C Trp was to depart Hon Quan at 0730 hours with C Co(-); however, this column was delayed until B Trp could reorganize.

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HOT AS FIRE: Mechanized flame thrower from 1st Platoon, C Troop, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry, helps out against a Viet Cong strong point.

121st Signal Battalion

At 0910 hours the column finally crossed the *Golden Gate* with B Trp leading and proceeded north on Highway 13 to the operational area. Upon arrival at Check Point 1, the 3d Platoon, B Trp, with the platoon of infantry turned east and conducted a reconnaissance to the ford at Check Point 2. Due to the depth of the ford, the platoon retraced the route to Check Point 1, turned north on Highway 13, passed through the 1st Platoon and continued north. The order of march was now 3d Plat with attached infantry, Troop Command Group, 2d Plat and 1st Plat.

Meanwhile, C Trp with C Co(-) arrived at Check Point 1, where it turned west and proceeded to the first stream. Three mortar carriers, 10 infantrymen and the 3d Plat remained at Check Point 1 and established a perimeter. The mortars were laid to the west to support the Trp(-) which, having crossed the stream now, dismounted the infantry and deployed.

At about 0938 hours when the lead personnel carrier of B Trp, moving north on Highway 13 towards Loc Ninh, reached a point midway across a rice paddy, it began to receive mortar, small arms and recoilless rifle fire and appeared to be the only one engaged.

First Lieutenant James P. Flores, B Trp commander, could see the mortar rounds bursting from his position in the column about 800 meters to the rear of the lead vehicle. He immediately called the squadron commander, Lieutenant Colonel Leonard Lewane, who was over the area in a light observation helicopter (LOH). The 3d Plat, B Trp, reported receiving heavy fire from the northeast and northwest. A pre-planned airstrike, which was currently in progress, was diverted to the action by Colonel Lewane at Lieutenant Flores' request.

The lieutenant then called the 2d Plat forward and deployed them around the 3d Plat. The 2d Plat brought its two tanks and one from the 1st Plat forward. By this time all but one tank and a personnel carrier of the 3d Plat had returned to Check Point 1 with wounded and to replenish ammunition. All platoons were now in contact on both sides

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121st Signal Battalion

▲ *Armed CH47 Chinook from the 11th Aviation Battalion.*

Due to the intensity of fire, "Dust Off" aircraft could not land and the squadron operations officer set up the LZ at the GOLDEN GATE. ▼

121st Signal Battalion

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of the road, with the heaviest volume of fire coming from the west.

The Viet Cong had set up the ambush in the shape of an "L" with a heavy security element crossing the road along the trail north of the rice paddy. The logs, piled at random to the west of Check Point 3, afforded good protection and some of the recoilless rifles were probably located there.

Mortars were reported by the forward air controller (FAC) in the woods north of the village of Srok Dong.

The ambush extended for about 2,000 meters and, except for the security element to the northeast of Check Point 3, the eastern side of the road was lightly defended. The Viet Cong appeared to be lined up all along the west side of the road with the heavy weapons about 150 meters from the road in the heaviest vegetation. They were wearing a variety of khaki, black and green uniforms.

The VC recoilless rifles caused most of the trouble and were also the most difficult to locate. During the first 30 minutes of contact, the enemy concentrated on knocking out the tanks. All four B Trp tanks were disabled from hits.

An intermediate aid station and strongpoint had been established at Check Point 1. Due to the intensity of fire there, "Dust Off" aircraft could not land; consequently, the squadron operations officer set up the landing zone (LZ) at the *Golden Gate*.

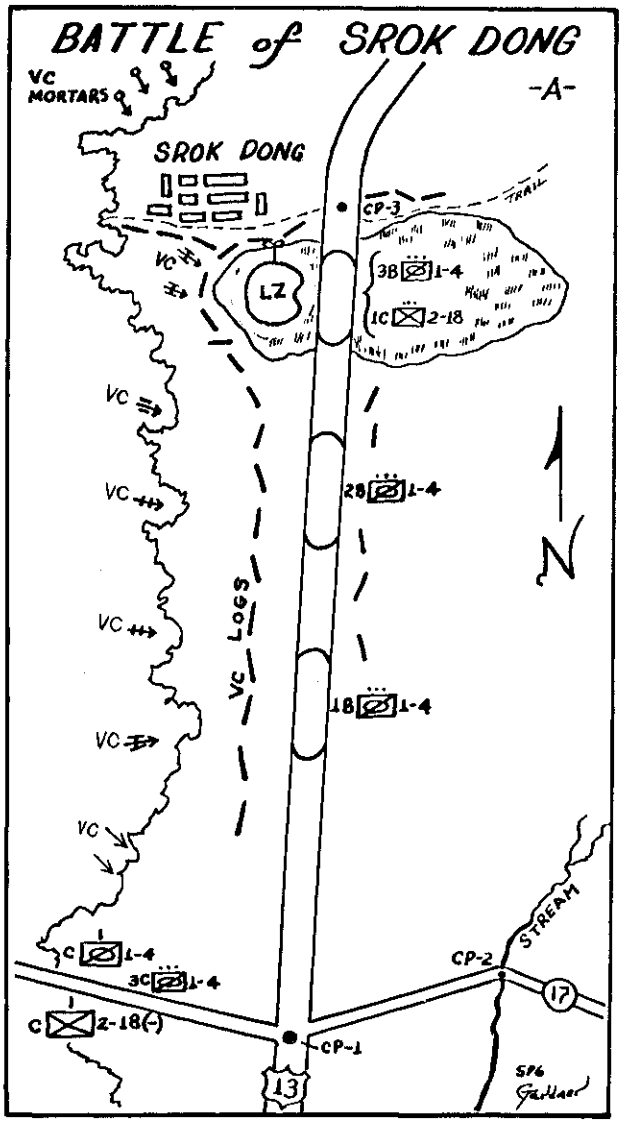
The evacuation of wounded was supervised by medical aidman Private First Class Charles F. Anderson, Chicago, who accompanied the first of the injured to the rear. For more than two hours, PFC Anderson, as the only medic available, tended the wounded and prepared them for evacuation by "Dust Off" helicopters. He kept the evacuation point in operation during a mortar attack and under heavy small arms fire. Though nearly exhausted when medical help finally arrived, Anderson continued to work until the last wounded man had been evacuated. He was later awarded the Silver Star Medal.

B Trp concentrated on laying down a heavy base of fire to the west. Airstrikes, which had been continuous since the initial contact, were being placed to the north and west. Artillery was attacking enemy targets to the east of Highway 13, while armed UHIBs (Hueys) and CH47s (Chinooks), nicknamed "Guns-A-Go-Go," were making firing passes north and south on the areas immediately adjacent to the road.

It appeared to Lieutenant Flores that the Viet Cong were attempting to cut him off from Check Point 1 when the 1st Plat reported receiving fire. An airstrike was immediately called in and the fire slackened at this location. The remainder of the elements at the head of the column were still receiving heavy fire from all types of weapons when Lieutenant Flores called Colonel Lewane, requesting C Trp to reinforce his unit.

When the first contact was reported, Captain Stephen Slattery, C Trp commander, ordered the infantry to mount up and prepare to move back to Check Point 1, establish a strong point and be prepared to assist B Trp. The 3d Plat had been receiving some light fire at Check Point 1 but when the other platoons arrived, the fire became more intense. Several of the infantrymen riding atop the personnel carriers were hit as mortar rounds started falling into the area. Captain Slattery ordered the platoons to deploy and push out the perimeter to the north. The 3d Plat was operating northwest of the crossroads, the 1st Platoon to the east and the 2d Platoon to the west and southwest.

The mortars had been relaid to the north. Check Point 1 was jammed with C Trp's maneuvering and vehicles returning with B Trp wounded. It continued to receive



Key to Map Symbols Appears on Page 40.

heavy small arms fire, mostly from the west of the road. Mortar and recoilless rifle fire was being answered with a heavy volume of .50 caliber fire from armored personnel carriers (APCs) at the road junction.

Colonel Lewane ordered C Trp to push north and relieve the pressure on B Trp. The 3d Plat was finally able to push north with a tank from the 2d Plat. About 200 meters from Check Point 1, the tank was hit in the turret, seriously injuring the commander and loader. They were pulled from the tank and evacuated. The damaged tank continued to move north and remained in the fight.

The C Trp column consisted of the 2d Plat, 1st Plat and the Troop Command. The 3d Plat, C Co(-) and the mortars remained at the crossroads. Intense fire was maintained by the personnel carriers and the tank. The brush was so thick and close on both sides of the road that grenades were just tossed over the sides of the vehicles.

About 600 meters from the location of its first hit, the 2d Plat tank was again hit but the driver kept on going, even though the gunner was wounded and evacuated.

When the C Trp column arrived at the B Trp position, Lieutenant Flores told the troopers to go further north and fire to the west. The 1st and 2d Platoons moved up and deployed as best they could, since they were confined to the area immediately left and right of the road. Fire was directed

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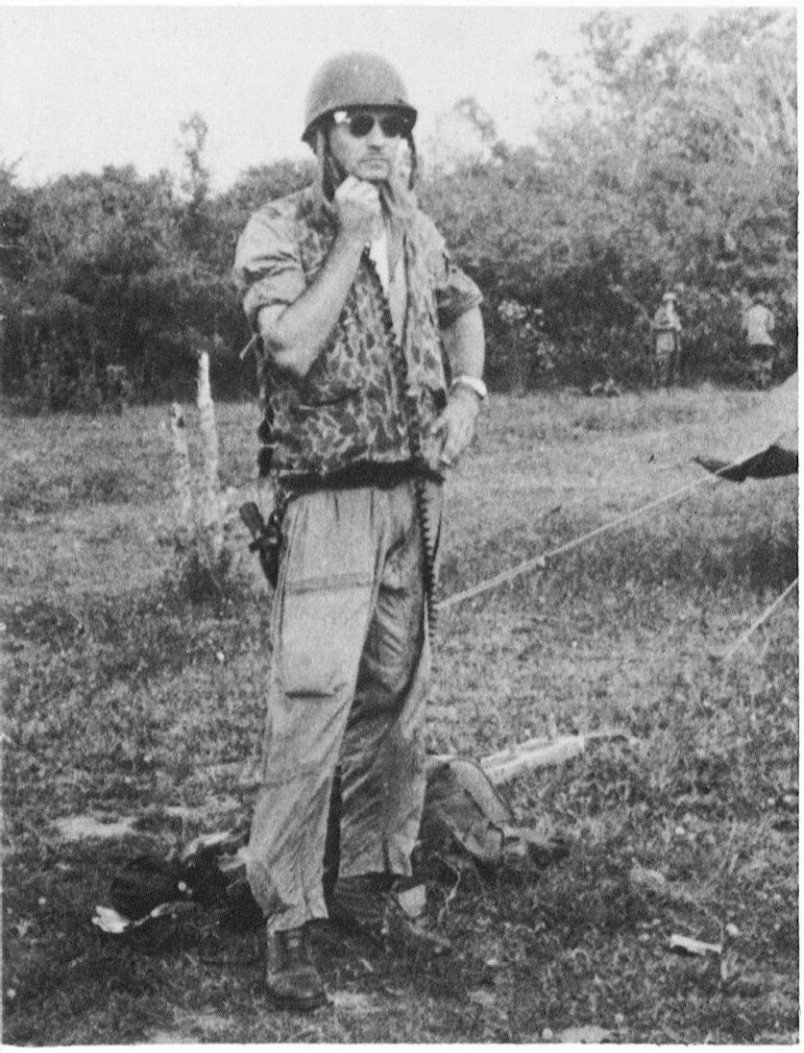
SP4 Reade Tilley III

LT W.C. Pflaum



▲ *Within five minutes after the battle began, an air observer was over the area.*

◀ *Mortars were reported by United States Air Force forward air controller (FAC) in the woods north of the village of Srok Dong.*

east and west with the heaviest volume to the west. Colonel Lewane ordered C Trp to hold at this point until B Trp could be extracted and moved south.

Artillery was firing north and east and airstrikes were being concentrated on the west, but appeared to be too far west. Captain Slattery asked Colonel Lewane to move them closer and the next airstrike came in south to north with anti-personnel bombs, which landed very close to the road.

With the arrival of C Trp, Lieutenant Flores pulled all the remaining B Trp elements back to Check Point 1. A Company, 2/28 Inf, had been alerted for airmobile employment in the vicinity of the landing zone south of Srok Dong at the same time that C Trp was ordered to reinforce. As the first lifts of A Co were approaching the LZ from Hon Quan, Lieutenant Flores pulled back.

B Trp remained at Check Point 1 for about 40 minutes to rearm and get the wounded and dead back to the *Golden Gate*. The next 30 minutes were taken to move the 1st and 2d Platoons back up the road to block; the 3d Plat handled the evacuation of the wounded.

Earlier Lieutenant Charles D. Cole with the 3d Plat, C Trp, had been directing the movement of casualties between the forward elements and the *Golden Gate*. When ordered north, he loaded C Co riflemen onto personnel carriers and moved to the head of the colunn. After the infantrymen arrived, the 3d Plat deployed west of the road and the 2d Plat moved to the east. Lieutenant Cole's platoon ran into a VC strongpoint. He was wounded in the chest together with several others before they could pull back.

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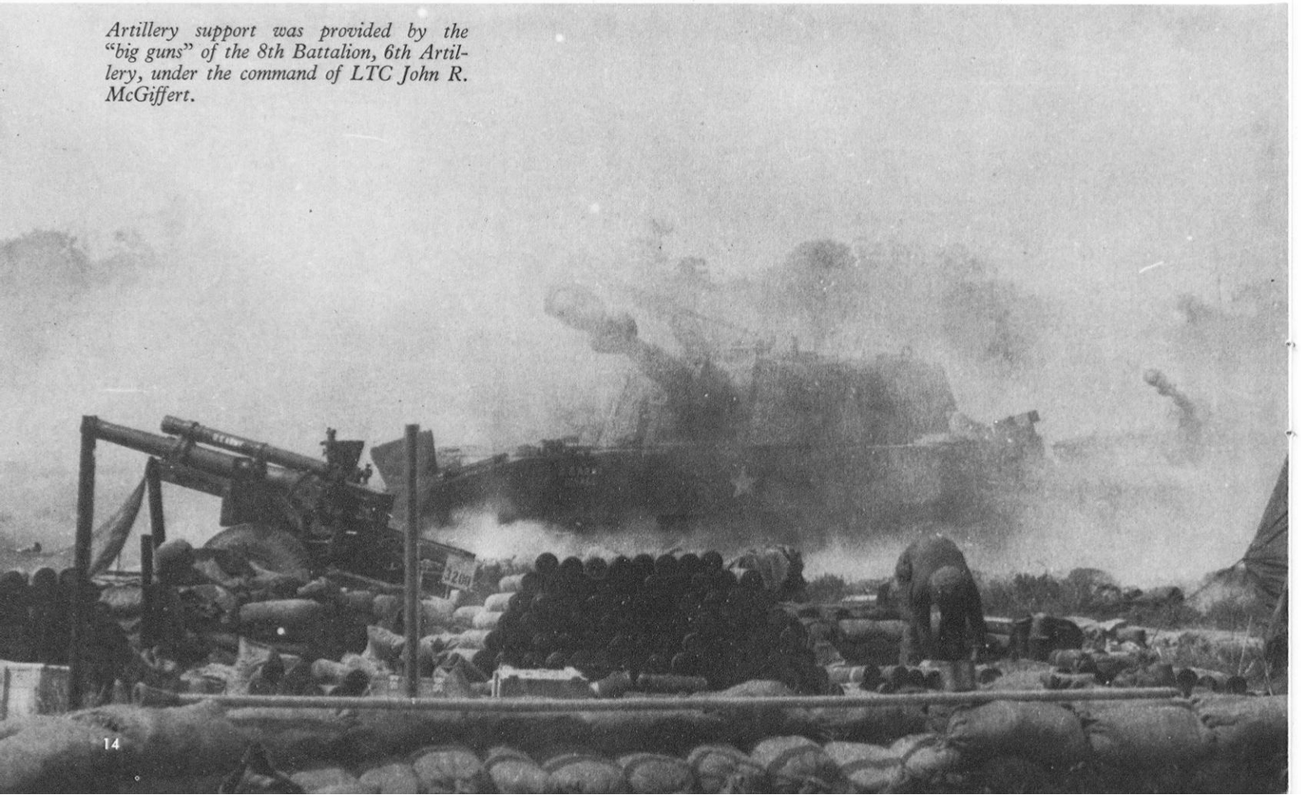
▼ 121st Signal Battalion

Artillery support was provided by the "big guns" of the 8th Battalion, 6th Artillery, under the command of LTC John R. McGiffert.



SP4 John C. Grove

◀ *LTC Lewane*

◀ *A total of 88 close tactical air sorties were flown in support of the battle.*

The mechanized flame thrower with Lieutenant John K. Lyon's 1st Plat assisted in the extraction of the 3d Plat. As the A Co infantrymen began landing on the LZ and C Co began to deploy, the fire slackened. Fire from the personnel carriers was directed more to the west. The Viet Cong started withdrawing and many of them were killed as they started to run through the high grass.

After a delay of about 30 minutes due to enemy fires received from both sides of the road, B Trp occupied its blocking positions. From these positions, the Viet Cong could be seen withdrawing along a trail that parallels the road and were taken under fire.

C Trp established a perimeter along Highway 13 until the infantry started making the sweep. By 1530 hours contact along the road had practically ceased and personnel moved into the brush to search for dead and wounded Viet Cong and weapons. The 3d Plat, B Trp, returned to the blocking position with the Aero Rifle Platoon of D Troop. Airstrikes and artillery continued to hammer the withdrawing Viet Cong. By 1700 hours the enemy activity had ceased and the two cavalry troops remained in position the remainder of the day.

During the battle, fire support played an important role in destroying the Viet Cong in the area. At the time B Trp made contact, a preplanned airstrike was in progress. The aircraft had commenced dropping anti-personnel bombs at the time Colonel Lewane notified the FAC that the armored column was in contact. The pilot pulled out of his southeast to northwest flight direction and brought his aircraft down the west side of Highway 13, expending the remainder of his ordnance.

A large group of Viet Cong was seen running east along the trail north of the rice paddy. The next flight concentrated on the logs at Check Point 3 and the trail.

A second FAC arrived about 1030 hours and started working along the trail. Colonel Lewane requested that the area along Highway 13 about 300 meters from the road be hit. The troop commander requested that the strike be moved closer to the road. During the dash of Lieutenant Cole's 3d Plat forward with the infantry, a napalm strike was placed along the west side of the road assisting its movement.

A total of 88 close tactical air sorties were flown in support of the battle. There was a minimum of one FAC on station at all times, who was in constant communication with either the squadron commander, operations officer or troop commanders.

Artillery direct support was provided by B Battery (155 mm) and D Battery (8-inch), 8th Battalion, 6th Artillery, located at Hon Quan. B Btry fired 548 rounds and D Btry fired 277 rounds from the time that contact was made until about 1900 hours.

Within five minutes after the battle began, an air observer was over the area. Initial enemy contact was most intense from the northeast and northwest. Artillery was fired on the trail north of the rice paddy. These fires were shifted to the woods north of Srok Dong. Colonel Lewane then directed artillery fire to the east of Highway 13. This was continued until he placed it as a block along the streamline to the west. Artillery and airstrikes were used to prepare the LZ and shifted prior to the troop landing. Artillery continued to block along the streamline to the west after the infantry deployed.

The 271st VC Regt lost 270 killed in action, 15 prisoners of war, 23 crew-served weapons and 40 rifles. Friendly casualties sustained were 10 men killed and 66 others wounded.

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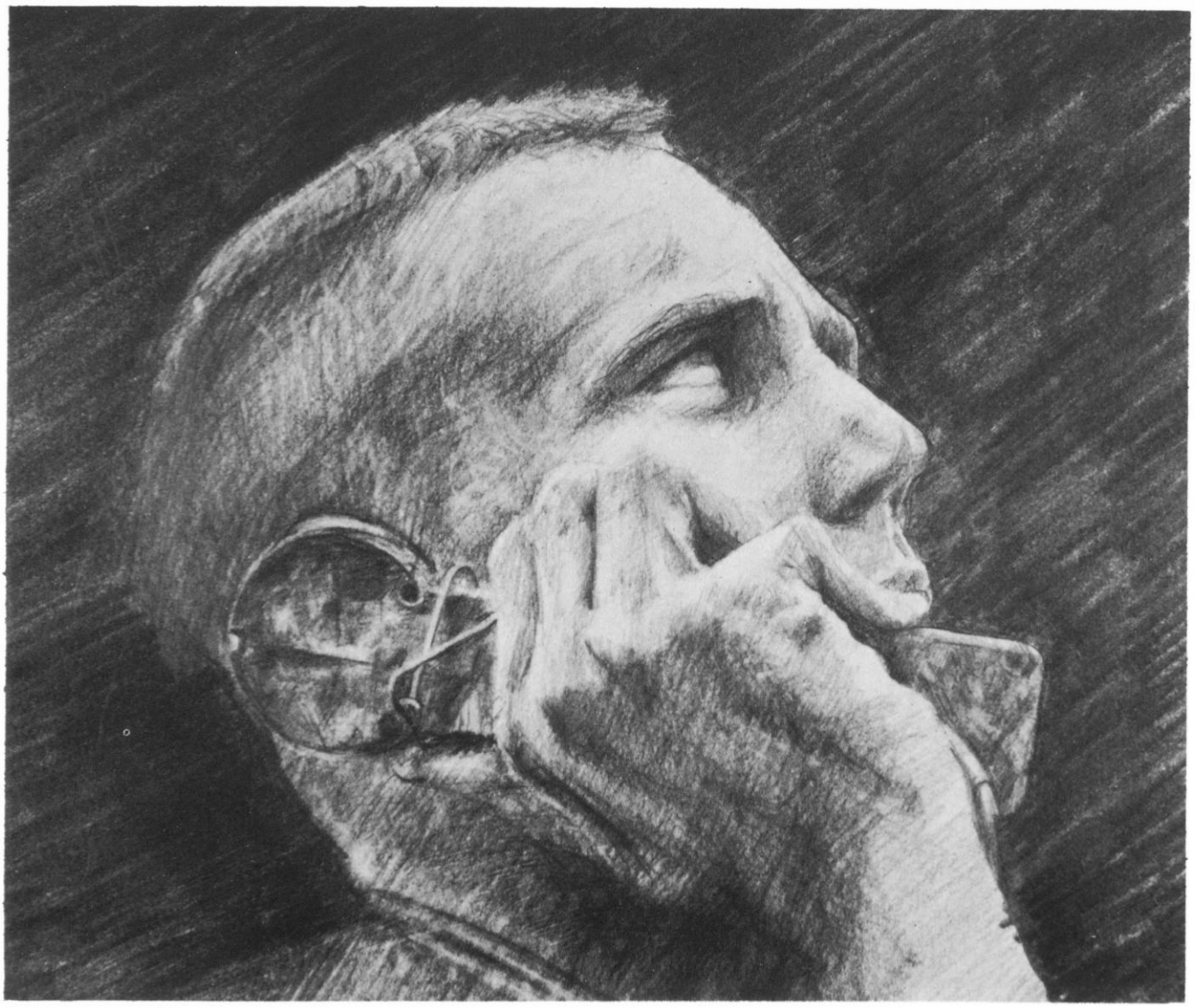
Vietnam Battles—II

HO KRIGNOU

Koichi Ando



THE BATTLE OF HO KRIGNOU marked the second time in as many days that BIG RED ONE troops repulsed powerful attacks by large forces of hard-core Viet Cong, turning the attacks into defeat for the enemy.

The battle took place the day after the 271st Viet Cong Regiment suffered a sound thrashing at the hands of the 1st Infantry Division on 30 June 1966. The engagement was in a remote, heavily jungled region west of the infamous National Highway 13, some 70 miles north of Saigon. At the conclusion of the 30 June conflict, troops from the 2d Battalion, 18th Infantry, commanded by LTC Herbert J. McChrystal, and the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry, commanded by LTC Robert Haldane, remained in the area, policing the battlefield and wiping out all semblance of VC resistance.

These two battalions were then airlifted to blocking positions northwest of the 30 June battle to intercept elements of the VC force attempting to escape. Landings were made in multiple landing zones at approximately 1000 and 1600 hours on 1 July. The battalions then began preparing overnight defensive positions.

First contact came about 1800 hours on 1 July as A Company, 2d Bn, 18th Inf, began receiving mortar and small arms fire into its perimeter. The attacking force was

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Troops from the 2d Battalion, 18th Infantry, and the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry, are airlifted into blocking positions northwest of the 30 June battle to intercept elements of the VC *force attempting to escape. Landings were made in multiple landing zones at 1000 and 1600 hours on 1 July 1966.*

later identified as the 3d Battalion of the 273d Viet Cong Regiment.

At the time of the initial contact, a platoon led by Sergeant Paul J. Yelverton, Jackson, Miss., was separated from the remainder of A Co while conducting a reconnaissance of the area. As the platoon began moving toward the company location, it too came under heavy fire from the Viet Cong. Realizing that the Viet Cong were attempting to encircle the platoon to prevent its joining the company, Sergeant Yelverton immediately went to the rear of the platoon to delay the attacking Viet Cong. Armed with a M-16 rifle and a .45 caliber pistol, he was able to successfully halt the VC force. He remained in position, although seriously wounded, until the platoon reached company lines. Sergeant Yelverton was awarded the Bronze Star Medal with "V" (Valor) device for his actions.

Later, C Company and the Reconnaissance Platoon of the 2/18 Inf were sent to the aid of A Co, 2/18 Inf, arriving shortly after dark. The mortar attack and small arms fire continued until about 2020 hours. The infantrymen worked far into the night, digging foxholes and strengthening their perimeter.

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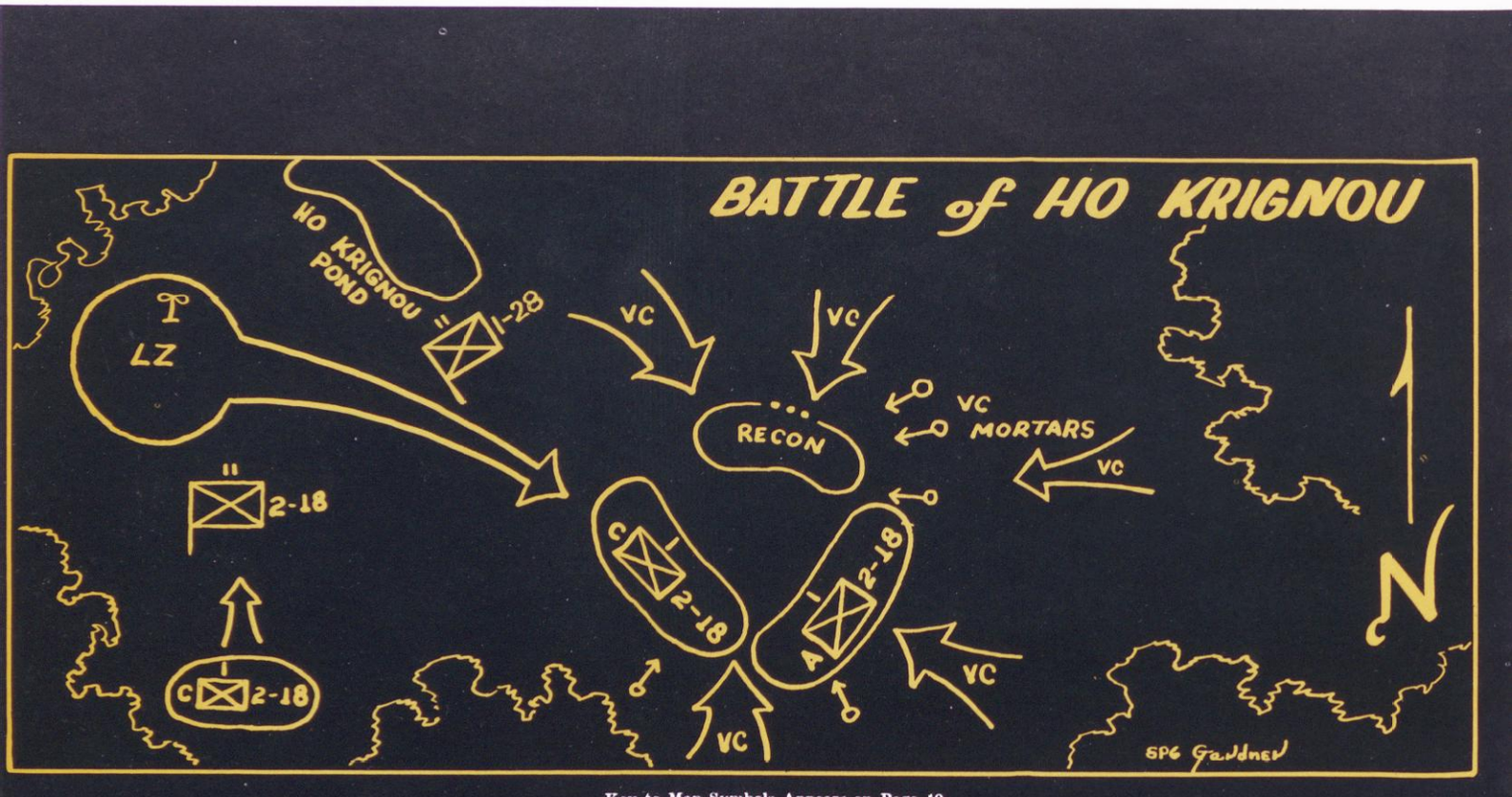

Key to Map Symbols Appears on Page 40.

At 0545 hours the next morning (2 July) the battle resumed with frightening ferocity as mortars began dropping on the 2/18 Inf's perimeter, followed by small arms and automatic weapons fire. The enemy then launched five assaults from all directions but the attacks were countered by fire support from artillery, gunships and 61 sorties of US fighter bombers brought in under a 200-foot ceiling. The battle was one of the most hard fought of the successful Operation EL PASO II. Again and again, the Viet Cong charged, only to be driven back in close-in fighting.

Specialist 4 Henry Caruso Jr., Chicago, was manning a machinegun when the attacks came. He and his assistant gunner countered the assaults with machinegun bursts to the left and grenade barrages to the right. They then switched the positions of the two weapons and resumed fire. Their actions not only resulted in heavy casualties for the Viet Cong but confused the enemy as well as to the number and positions of the weapons.

On three occasions Specialist Caruso turned his weapon over to his assistant, while he himself braved intense fire in order to mark the perimeter with smoke grenades for airstrikes. Although wounded, he continually exposed himself to carry ammunition to an automatic weapon 50 meters away. Upon arriving at the weapon, he found it jammed and most of the crew wounded. Caruso rapidly disassembled and cleared the weapon, later returning under withering fire to his original post. He was awarded the Silver Star Medal for his actions.

When the battle began, reinforcements were called for immediately as artillery pounded the enemy. Throughout the day, division artillery units under the command of Colonel Marlin W. Camp of Alexandria, Va., rained more than 1800 rounds of high explosive ammunition down on the Viet Cong.

Despite the adverse weather and poor visibility resulting from heavy ground fog, the pilots of the Seventh Air Force hit the enemy with amazing accuracy. The deadly fire from the planes flying at low altitude hammered at the attacking Viet Cong.

During the battle, the defenders ran low on ammunition, but resupply helicopters were never far from the scene. The fighting was so close at times that grenades were used to repel the attackers. One man reported that the Viet Cong were at times within three to four feet of his position. Another soldier said that the enemy was so close that they were throwing grenades over his position. All had great praise for the Air Force pilots.

By 0900 hours, after over three hours of intense fighting, the enemy broke contact and withdrew, remaining under the unrelenting fire of artillery and airstrikes. As the Viet Cong scattered, the 1/28 Inf joined the 2/18 Inf at 0930 hours and together both units began to sweep the area.

At approximately 1320 hours the 1st Battalion, 2d Infantry; B and C Troops, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry; and an attached Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) armored personnel carrier troop and rifle company secured blocking positions and routes of communication to the east of the battle area.

During the search, many Viet Cong were discovered in shallow graves. The 1/28 Inf remained in the area overnight as the men of the 2/18 Inf were extracted to Quan Loi. Seventy-eight Viet Cong were killed during the battle. US casualties for the action stood at seven killed and 22 wounded.

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IN THE JUNGLE: Moving through dense undergrowth, a soldier from the 2d Battalion, 18th Infantry, moves to a more advantageous position.

121st Signal Battalion

BIG GUNS: Men of the 1st Battalion, 7th Artillery, pictured below, prepare to fire one of the more than 1,800 rounds of ammunition poured on the enemy by division artillery. ▼

SP4 Joe Connor

LTC Haldane

COL Camp

LTC McChrystal

AIR SUPPORT: A member of the 2d Battalion, 18th Infantry, watches US Air Force jet on bombing run. In all, the Air Force flew 61 sorties during the battle despite a dangerously low ceiling. ▼

SP4 Jerry S. White

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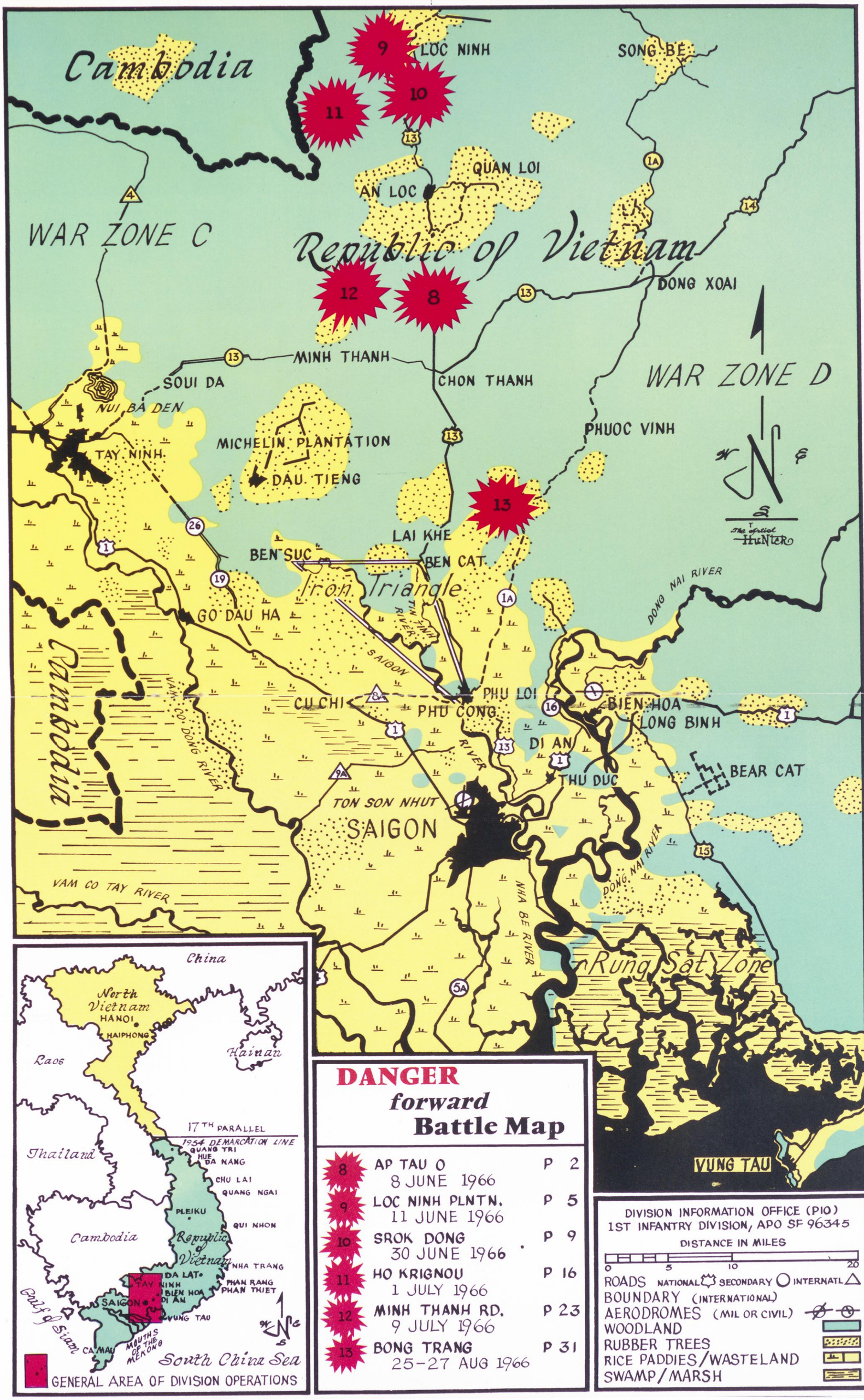

DANGER forward Battle Map

8	AP TAU O 8 JUNE 1966	P 2
9	LOC NINH PLNTN. 11 JUNE 1966	P 5
10	SROK DONG 30 JUNE 1966	P 9
11	HO KRIGNOU 1 JULY 1966	P 16
12	MINH THANH RD. 9 JULY 1966	P 23
13	BONG TRANG 25-27 AUG 1966	P 31

DIVISION INFORMATION OFFICE (PIO)
1ST INFANTRY DIVISION, APO SF 96345

DISTANCE IN MILES
0 5 10 20

ROADS NATIONAL SECONDARY INTERNATL
BOUNDARY (INTERNATIONAL)
AERODROMES (MIL OR CIVIL)
WOODLAND
RUBBER TREES
RICE PADDIES/WASTELAND
SWAMP/MARSH

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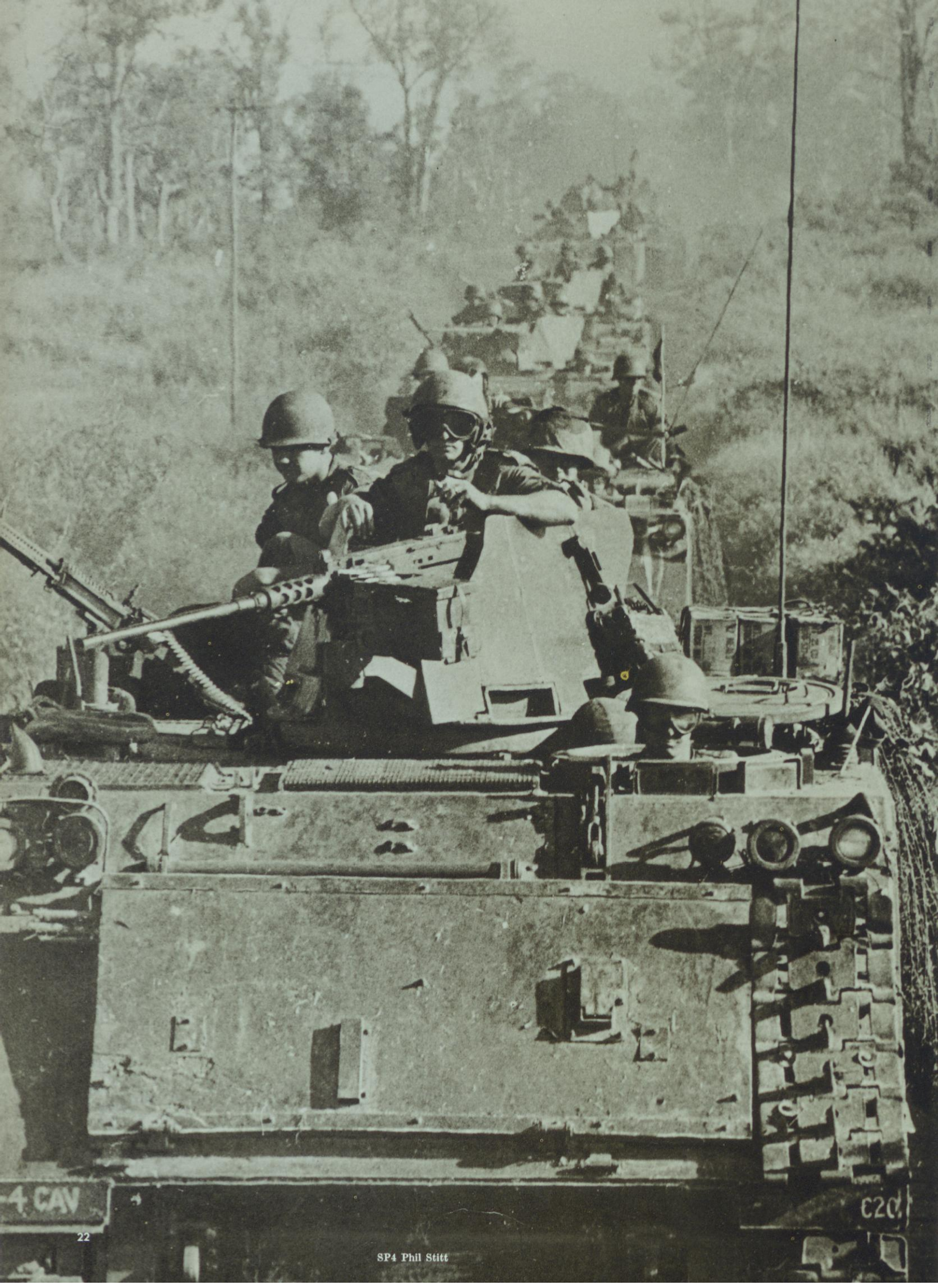

SP4 Phil Stitt

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MG DePuy

MINH THANH ROAD

By MG W. E. DePuy
Former Commanding General, 1st Infantry Division

THE BATTLE OF MINH THANH ROAD was one of five major actions in which the BIG RED ONE engaged and soundly defeated all three main force regiments of the 9th Viet Cong Division during Operation EL PASO II in June and July 1966. For the first time in the Vietnam War, three carefully laid regimental-size enemy ambushes against road columns were turned into crushing Viet Cong defeats.

The last and most violent battle, as well as the greatest VC defeat at that time, was on the road from An Loc to Minh Thanh in Binh Long Province, 70 miles north of Saigon. The enemy force was the battle-tested 272d Main Force Regiment, the elite regiment of the 9th VC Div.

The concept of the operation was inspired by two considerations. First, the 272d Regt had been badly punished by the 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry, on National Highway 13 in early June, and it is the nature of this regiment to seek revenge. Secondly, intelligence sources had identified the 272d Regt as being active to the west of Highway 13 in north central Binh Duong Province and north of the Minh Thanh Road. Additionally, the unit had received 800 replacements from North Vietnam after its 8 June defeat.

SP4 Ronald E McCullum

CLOSE QUARTERS: 1st Platoon, C Troop, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry, comes under heavy fire and deploys. The fight raged at close quarters along the entire 1,200 meters of the column.

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TASK FORCE DRAGOON *began its march along Route Knife. Initially,* **BIG RED ONE** *soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 2d Infantry, marched two platoons flanking the road. But as the force approached the supected ambush site, the thick underbrush, deep streams and jungle growth forced all elements back on the road.*

121st Signal Battalion

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Colonel Sidney B. Berry Jr., then 1st Brigade commander, was given the mission in early June of developing a plan to draw the 272d Regt into battle. Colonel Berry's order for Operation OLYMPIA/EL PASO II was issued 6 July. The mission was to use deception to position forces and conduct reconnaissance in force to bring major enemy forces into the battle along the Minh Thanh Road, enabling the brigade to destroy them by offensive action.

The concept provided for rapid reaction by air, artillery and infantry against attacking VC forces, while the cavalry stood off the initial assault.

Extensive reconnaissance and war-gaming took place in order to determine which ambush sites would be most likely and what would be the appropriate reaction to each one. The main consideration here was the availability of suitable landing zones for rapid reinforcement of the column after initiation of contact and moves to cut off routes of withdrawal. The analysis of likely enemy ambush sites revealed several possibilities along Route *Knife*. The most dangerous site, and therefore the most likely one, lay on the north side of *Knife* between Check Points *Tom and Dick*.

In order to improve the odds that the 272d Regt would, in fact, strike along Route *Knife* it was decided to leak information that a small armored cavalry column was going to travel the route to and from Minh Thanh for the purpose of retrieving bulldozers and trucks, which had been improving the airstrip there. Next, it was decided to add a deception plan to the operation, which would cover and explain the deployment of artillery to Artillery Base 1.

The deception plan, which would become Phase I of the operation, involved an airmobile feint into a landing zone (LZ) near Sroc Con Trang, north of Artillery Base 1, on 8 July. On 30 June the BIG RED ONE had captured a VC plan to attack and annihilate a US battalion on this LZ. Thirty minutes after the feint in which 30 choppers would actually touch down following a normal TAC air and artillery preparation, a B-52 strike would hit the areas in which we suspected the presence of the 273d Regiment of the 9th VC Div. Enemy casualties from this strike were to be regarded as a bonus effect of the deception.

Phase II would commence 9 July with Task Force DRAGOON, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Leonard L. Lewane, conducting a reconnaissance in force from An Loc along Route *Knife* to Minh Thanh. Forces in the task force included B and C Troops, 1st Sqdn, 4th Cav, and B Company, 1st Battalion, 2d Infantry (LTC Richard L. Prillaman, Bn CO). In the event that the enemy chose to ambush the column on either the initial or return trip, forces of the 1st Bde would be positioned to respond immediately as required. Commitment of initial battalions would be against the immediate enemy flanks. Remaining battalions would be committed to the battle area as needed. Landing zones and blocking positions were chosen astride likely enemy routes of withdrawal. They would be occupied on order.

The 1st Bde began positioning reaction and supporting forces 7 July. Headquarters, B and D Batteries, 8th Battalion, 6th Artillery, and A Battery, 1st Battalion, 5th Artillery, moved to Artillery Base 1. The 2d battalion, 2d Infantry, commanded LTC Jack L. Conn, commenced an airlift infiltration movement to Minh Thanh. On 8 July it joined the 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry, commanded by MAJ John C. BARD; and C Battery, 1st Battalion, 33d Artillery, which had been in the area for over a week.

Later on that day Headquarters Battery, 5th Artillery; and C Battery, 1st Battalion, 7th Artillery, moved to Artillery Base II. Security for the artillery at Base II was provided by C Company, 2d Bn, 2d Inf, and a Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) armored personnel carrier troop. When he had completed the simulated air landing called for in Phase I, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Haldane moved

SGT John R. Kettle

ROUGH TERRAIN: Men of the 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry, find the going slow as they move through difficult terrain en route to blocking positions.

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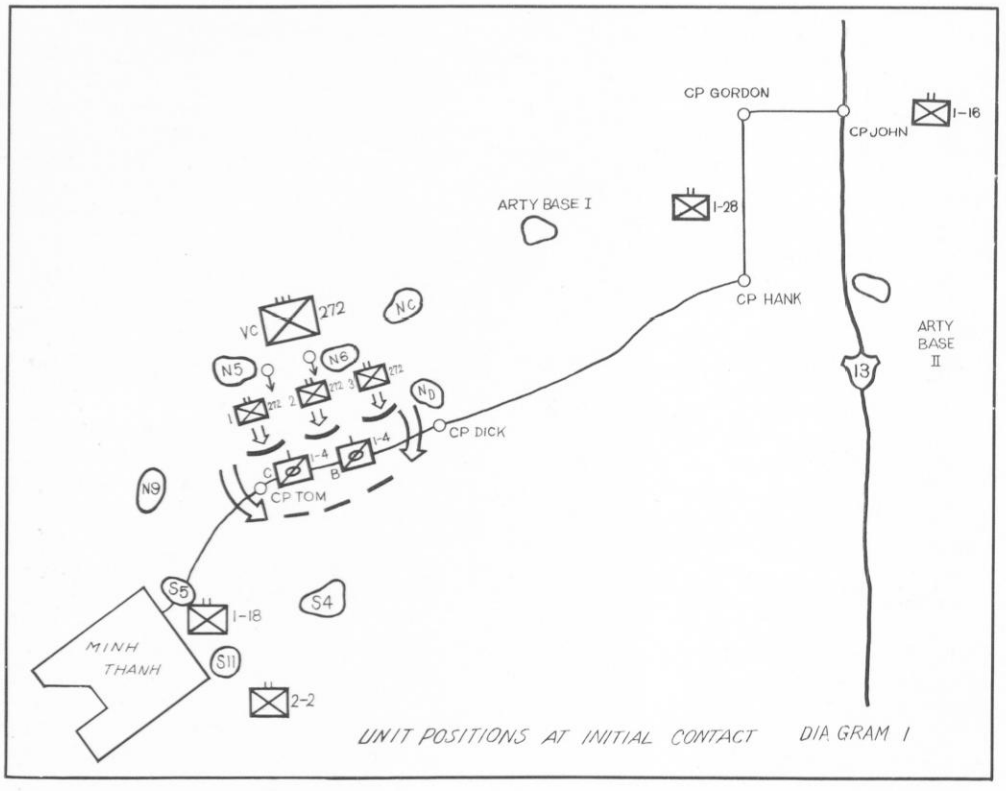

UNIT POSITIONS AT INITIAL CONTACT DIAGRAM 1

LTC Prillaman

his 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry, into positions around an abandoned airstrip near Artillery Base I.

The 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Rufus C. Lazzell, was moved from Lai Khe to Quan Loi by air and came under operational control (OPCON) of the 1st Bde.

Radio Hanoi has described the armored columns of the BIG RED ONE as being like "walls of steel that even ants cannot penetrate." The battle of 9 July lends weight to that observation.

At 0900 hours, following a two-hour wait for the overcast and ground fog to clear, Task Force DRAGOON began its march along Route *Knife*. C Trp, 4th Cav, commanded by Captain Steven Slattery, led the column, followed by Captain David Kelly's B Trp. The soldiers of B Co, 1st Bn, 2d Inf, were mounted on C Trp's armored personnel carriers (APCS).

Initially, C Trp marched with two platoons flanking the road, followed by the Command Group and the 3d Platoon. But as the force approached the suspected ambush site, the thick underbrush and jungle growth forced all elements back on the road.

As the column moved along, it was preceded by artillery barrages some 300 meters to its front and flanks. Armed helicopters also provided reconnaissance by fire in the forward and flank areas. Observation helicopters made repeated low-level passes with negative results.

As the column neared the bridge at Check Point *Dick*, engineer mine detector teams examined the area and found the bridge to be mined. The teams cleared the bridge and Colonel Lewane moved the column on. The BIG RED ONE troops did not have long to wait for action. At 1050 hours a forward air controller (FAC) spotted 10 Viet Cong crossing the road from north to south, 750 meters ahead of the armor.

At 1110 hours Lieutenant John Lyons, who was leading the column with his 1st Platoon, saw five more Viet Cong crossing in the same direction. Moments later, he reported 10 more of the enemy and had them taken under fire from his lead tank. The battle had begun (See DIAGRAM 1).

Within minutes, the fight was raging at close quarters along the entire 1,200 meters of the column as the Viet Cong moved three battalions abreast into the assault. They employed 75 mm recoilless rifle and RPG-2 anti-tank fire against the armored vehicles, while riflemen attempted to swarm over the column.

In the early minutes it was difficult to tell whether the main effort was on the north or south side of the road. Some time went by before the commanders on the ground could locate the main direction of attack on the north side. The fire support plan designated the Minh Thanh Road as the fire coordination line (FCL) between the artillery and tactical air support—the artillery on the north side; the fighter bombers on the south.

Extremely heavy concentrations of 8-inch, 105 mm and 155 mm artillery fire were immediately called in on the attacking VC forces on the north side of the road. The FACs responded with 96 sorties, initially hitting targets on the south side of the road but later shifting to the north. It was later estimated that more than half of the enemy casualties were cause by air and artillery strikes, although the cavalry inflicted a heavy toll along the road itself.

As the battle began to take shape, Colonel Berry alerted Major Bard to move his 1st Bn, 18th Inf, to position N9 on order (See DIAGRAM 2).

He also sent Lieutenant Colonel Conn's 2d Bn, 2d Inf, in motion toward the northeast.

The 1/18 Inf began its movement by foot from position S5 to N9 at 1117 hours with a blocking mission. This mission was later modified when the battalion found the going too slow in the jungle. Its new mission found the unit moving along the north side of the road to relieve pressure on the cavalry and to hit the Viet Cong on the west flank.

The 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry, received its orders at 1130 hours to move to landing zone ND by helicopter, then to attack to the southwest on the north side of the road. The battalion would hit the enemy's east flank. The 1st Bn, 28th Inf, commenced movement at 1210 hours and closed at 1230 hours. It was placed under OPCON of Colonel Lewane of the 4th Cav on landing.

Colonel Berry also alerted the 1st Bn, 16th Inf, for move-

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ment, and at 1336 hours it was ordered to commence a heliborne assault on landing zone NC and to be prepared to move to N5 or N6 on order. The battalion closed at 1430 hours and was immediately dispatched to N5 with orders to organize a blocking position. It was slowed in its movement by the dense jungle and did not close its position until late afternoon, thus some of the enemy were able to escape to the northwest. During a fight against a VC rear guard in a fortified position, Colonel Lazzell was wounded by a .50 caliber round. Colonel Berry assumed temporary command until a replacement, Lieutenant Colonel George M. Wallace III,could be flown to the area.

At 1200 hours the commander of the 8/6 Arty, LTC John R. McGiffert, flying in a light observation helicopter (LOH), directed 8-inch howitzer fire on a VC anti-aircraft position and destroyed it. Colonel Berry brought the 2d Bn, 2d Inf, into landing zone NC right behind the 1/16 Inf. The 2/2 Inf then established its blocking position at the LZ upon clearing at 1755 hours.

While the blocking positions were being established and the maneuver battalions were being brought into the battle, the 4th Cav had double-banked B and C Trps along the road, where they were involved in an intense fight with the Viet Cong on both sides of the road. The enemy used mortars, recoilless rifle and numerous automatic weapons in an attempt to overrun the column and managed temporarily to swarm over two APCs. Two other carriers were destroyed by direct mortar hits on the engine compartments.

The 90 mm cannister ammunition fired by the tanks, together with the .50 caliber and M-60 machineguns, small arms, M-79 grenade launchers and hand grenades employed by the cavalry and the infantry, supported by 2,200 rounds of artillery and the tactical airstrikes, proved too much for the Viet Cong. The enemy started to break contact about 1330 hours. Prisoners later stated that several units broke and ran.

Meanwhile, Colonel Lewane had committed the 1/28 Inf against the east flank of the ambush site. The covering force of the enemy broke contact with the battalion at 1540 hours. The BIG RED ONE troops then swept southwest along the north side of the road, mopping up as they moved.

At the other end of the ambush site, the 1/18 Inf sliced into the worn flank of the Viet Cong and overran elements of the covering force in heavy combat in trenches and bunkers.

The next morning a police of the battlefield disclosed small groups of fleeing enemy, abandoned trenches and bunkers and the following statistical count: 239 enemy killed in action; eight Viet Cong captured; 23 crew-served weapons and numerous small arms captured.

The highlights of this victory are many. First, armor was used as a fixing force, while infantry battalions were used as the maneuver elements. The fixing force was too strong to be overrun, thus forcing the enemy to fight a prolonged but unsuccessful battle, while maneuver elements hit his rear and flanks

Second, the plan was based on an accurate assessment of the enemy's intentions.

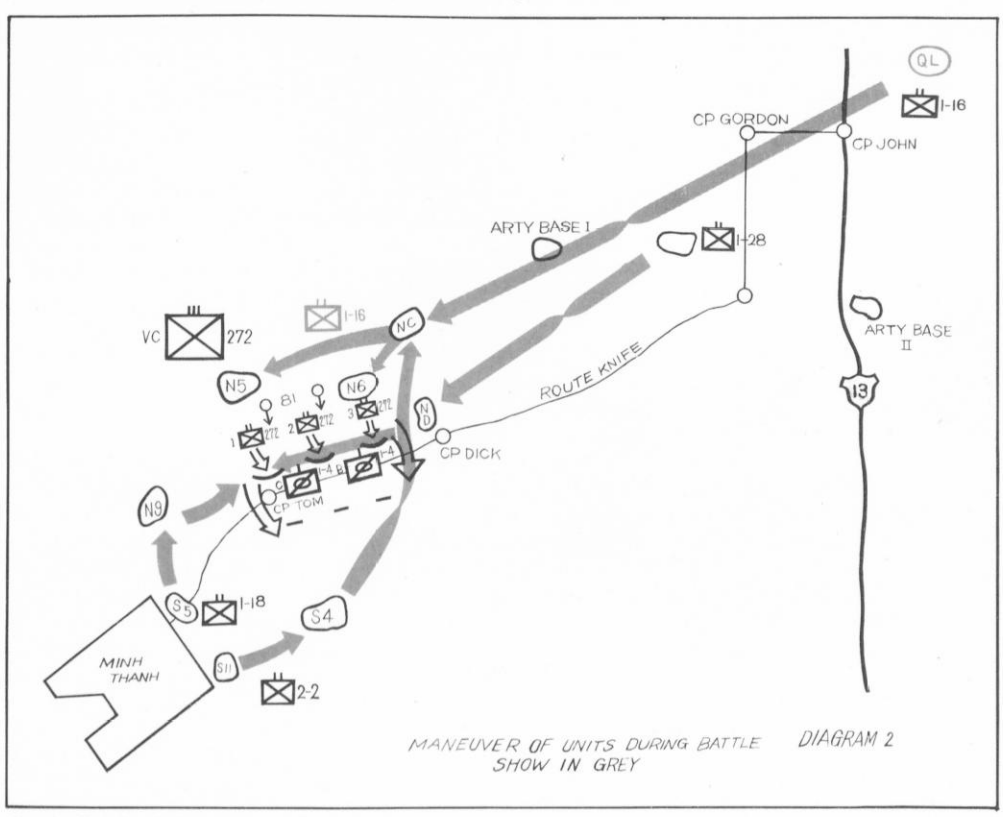
Third, all commanders were prepared to respond to several courses of action as a result of the thorough wargaming which proceeded the battle.

Fourth, the use of the fire coordination lines along the road provided for simultaneous and continuous air and artillery support.

And fifth, the inherent mobility of the infantry division, when provided sufficient lift capability, facilitated the rapid deployment of the maneuver and blocking elements.

Of equal importance were the lessons learned for future application. In order to bring sufficient firepower to bear on a numerically superior force at the ambush site, it is imperative that artillery and tactical air fire support be directed against the enemy's main force, immediately and continuously.

The enemy's main direction of attack must be ascertained early in order to permit the maneuver of blocking forces to the enemy's routes of withdrawal. In this battle, many of the enemy's committed forces infiltrated from the battle area before blocking forces fully closed the trap. In other engagements, the Viet Cong would fight for four to six hours.



MANEUVER OF UNITS DURING BATTLE
SHOW IN GREY

DIAGRAM 2

LTC Conn

Key to Map Symbols Appears on Page 40.

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Possibly the most important lesson learned from this battle is that the use of armor in breaking an enemy ambush can be decisive. When led by tanks, a cavalry column can take the punishment and respond with adequate firepower during the critical early period until infantry battalions can be introduced by helicopter or foot movement to the battle area.

The price the enemy paid was high; prisoner interrogations indicated that the 9th VC Div lost over 2,000 men in its three ambushes and two other battles with the BIG RED ONE in June and July 1966.

Finally, it was not the excellence of the planning but the valor of the troopers of the 4th Cav and the infantry soldiers that brought victory.

SP4 John C. Grove

LT John R. Lyons, 1st Platoon Leader, C Troop, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry, works on ledger while waiting for word to move out on the Minh Thanh Road.

QUARTERHORSE: Elements of the 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry, begin reconnaissance in force on Minh Thanh Road.

121st Signal Battalion

A B-52 strike hits LZ *near Sroc Con Trang, north of Artillery Base 1, on 8 July. The strike by the U. S. Air Force netted many causalties from the 273d Regiment of the 9th* VC *Division.*

U.S. Air Force Photo

121st Signal Battalion

GEN W.C. Westmoreland, MACV commander, congratulates PFC Jeffery J. Henry, a member of B Troop, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry, after presenting him with the Distinguished Service Cross. ▶

ON THE WAY: A 105 mm howitzer round is sent on its way in support of the 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry, during the ▼ *Battle of Minh Thanh Road.*

SP4 Joe Connor

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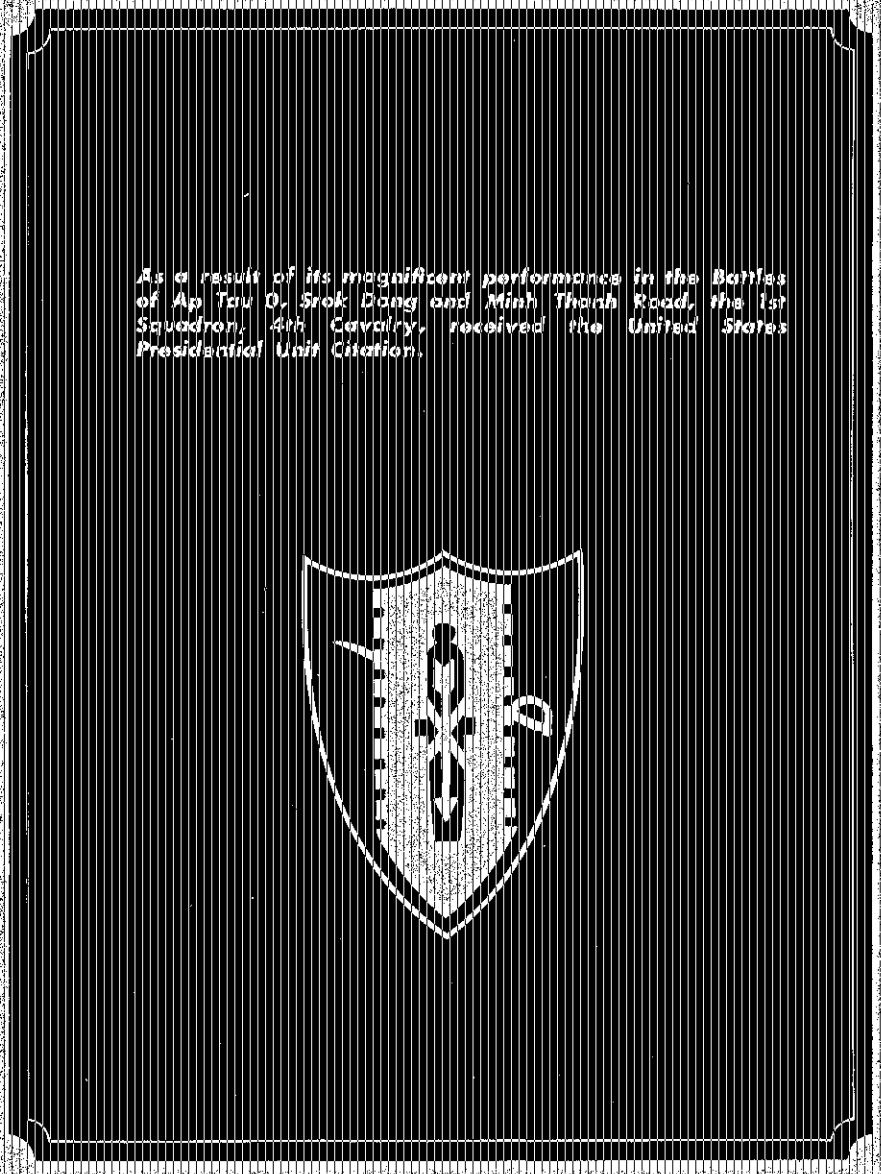
As a result of its magnificent performance in the Battles of Ap Tau O, Srok Dang and Minh Thanh Road, the 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry, received the United States Presidential Unit Citation.

BONG TRANG

Vietnam Battles—13

During the BATTLE OF BONG TRANG, BIG RED ONE *soldiers reported that the Viet Cong were in the trenchline with them. When it appeared a patrol from the 1st Battalion, 2d Infantry, might be overrun, the patrol called in artillery fire on its own position.*

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SP4 Phil Stitt ▼ ▲SFC Frank P. Castro

VC POSITION: Members of the 1st Battalion, 2d Infantry, pass over a Viet Cong position which typifies the complexity of the Phu Loi Battalion's base camp.

THE BATTLE OF BONG TRANG was an exceedingly fierce engagement with the Main Force Viet Cong Phu Loi Battalion. It was fought in the Bong Trang Woods about four miles east of Lai Khe and 25 miles north of Saigon near National Highway 16 on 25 Aug 1966, during Operation AMARILLO.

AMARILLO began 23 Aug. The units involved were under the operational control (OPCON) of the 1st Brigade, commanded by Colonel Sidney B. Berry Jr. The original plan was to clear and secure a section of Highway 16 and then to conduct search and destroy operations and pass resupply convoys along the route. The 1st Battalion, 2d Infantry, was to clear the highway from Phuoc Hoa south to its intersection with the route code-named *Orange*. The 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, commanded by LTC Paul F. Gorman, was to clear the highway south from that point to the village of Binh Co.

On 23 Aug the 1st Bn, 2d Inf, commanded by LTC Richard L. Prillaman, and an attached battery from the 1st Battalion, 5th Artillery, left the 1st Bde basecamp at Phuoc Vinh and moved by land vehicles to Phuoc Hoa. Backed up by artillery and followed by A Company, 1st Engineer Battalion (which had the task of repairing the road), the infantrymen began a sweep along Highway 16.

In the early evening, a defensive perimeter was set up. It was composed of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Bde; C Company, 2d Inf; A Company, 1st Eng Bn; and D Battery, 1st Bn, 5th Arty. The night passed uneventfully.

The next day, 24 Aug, the 1st Bn, 26th Inf, moved by air to the intersection of Route 1A and National Highway 13. As A and B Companies, 1/2 Inf, continued to push south, the 1/26 Inf began to clear and secure its assigned sector. The task was accomplished in time for a southbound convoy to pass without incident.

The 1/26 Inf closed into two tight defensive positions. C Troop, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry, moved to link up with the 1/26 Inf. At 1930 hours, a 15-man patrol from C Co, 1/2 Inf, moved out with the mission of locating VC personnel, bases or materials.

At 0640 hours the next morning, 25 Aug, 10 minutes after A and B Companies, 1/2 Inf, and A and B Companies, 1/26 Inf, had resumed their respective clear and secure missions, the latter battalion was informed that the 15-man partrol had encountered an estimated VC battalion. THE BATTLE OF BONG TRANG had begun.

The remainder of C Co, 1/2 Inf, was alerted to reinforce its patrol and at 0755 hours, mounted on armored personnel carriers of C Trp, 1st Sqdn, 4th Cav, moved out. C Co, 1/26 Inf, was placed on standby alert at 0731 hours.

At 0759 hours the patrol from the 1/2 Inf, which was located in a VC basecamp-an area well fortified by a sophisticated network of trenches with overhead cover, firing positions and protective shelters-reported that the Viet Cong were in the trenchline with it. Artillery was called in and adjusted by a forward observer (FO) with the patrol. When it was about to be overrun, the patrol called in artillery fire on its own position. Airstrikes were called in and the artillery began firing concentrations to block the VC escape.

At 0826 hours A and B Companies, 1/26 Inf, were alerted to move out to the vicinity of the engagement. At 0838 hours the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry, commanded by LTC George M. Wallace III, was placed on a 30-minute alert by the division commander, Major General William E.

CAV MOVING: C Troop, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry, moves through the jungle to reinforce the patrol that made original contact with the Viet Cong in what was to become the Battle of Bong Trang.

25 AUGUST BATTLE: Men of the 2d Battalion, 28th Infantry, move towards the Battle of Bong Trang.

SP4 Reade Tilley III

DePuy. At 0900 hours C Co, 1/2 Inf, rode into the basecamp and engaged the enemy. At 0955 hours the commander of C Co, Captain William J. Mullen III, Tulare, Calif., lost contact with the patrol. Each time the unit tried to move to the patrol's location, it encountered intense enemy fire. B Co, 1/2 Inf, was alerted for movement to the battle area where it was to join up with C Co, 1/2 Inf. At 1022 hours the 2d Battalion, 28th Infantry, commanded by LTC Elmer D. Pendleton, was alerted to move to a blocking position. The battalion moved north at 1055 hours on foot.

A and B Companies, 1/26 Inf, were moved with great difficulty by engineer vehicles through the frustratingly dense jungle growth. Meanwhile, the 1st Bn, 16th Inf, was airlifted from Lai Khe into a landing zone (LZ) which had been prepared by artillery fire and airstrikes. The unit was completely deployed in the LZ by 1124 hours. At 1200 hours the 1/16 Inf moved due east, employing two companies on line and one in reserve with reconnaissance screening the north flank. At 1258 hours C Co, 1/26 Inf, lead elements joined up with C Co, 1/2 Inf. As each unit reached the battle area, it deployed and entered the fight. The link up of all ground elements was completed by 1330 hours. At that time, Captain Mullen (who was later to receive the Distinguished Service Cross for his valor in the action) was placed in command of the ground elements pending arrival of the command group.

At 1520 hours B Co, 1/26 Inf, overran an enemy machinegun position. From this point on, the enemy resistance became much heavier. The 1/26 Inf found itself in the heart of the enemy basecamp. Heavy contact was sustained from 1547 to 1911 hours.

At 1555 hours B Company, 1/16 Inf, arrived at a large VC basecamp. At 1600 hours the battalion's A Company moved into the basecamp. Both companies then continued through the basecamp area to accomplish the relief operation. At 1608 hours A Co, 1/16 Inf, linked up with 1/26 Inf and 1/2 Inf elements. Shortly afterwards, B Co, 1/16 Inf, arrived. The latter unit was directed to attack north maintaining contact with the 1/26 Inf on its right.

At 1617 hours B Co, 1/16 Inf, received heavy small arms, automatic weapons and M-79 grenade launcher fire. At 1620 hours the 1/16 Inf was ordered to change the direction of its attack to the north, bending around to the northeast, thereby keeping its right flank unit in contact with the 1/26 Inf and the 1/2 Inf. A Co was ordered to attack to the right (east) with two platoons abreast and maintain contact with friendly forces on its right. B Co was to move abreast of A Co and attack north on the left (west) flank, employing two platoons abreast. C Co was to follow B Co in reserve. The command group was following and moved north to join the remainder of B Co. At 1635 hours, with forces disposed so, the 1/16 Inf began its attack north.

At an undetermined time, the 1/2 Inf moved back several hundred yards. The right platoon of A Co, 1/2 Inf, became heavily engaged with VC forces. The reserve platoon was committed to the right of the company. Both platoons then became heavily engaged, receiving heavy casualties. The other platoon of A Co, which was employed to the west, continued moving through the jungle with only minor contact. When the company commander was killed, one of his platoons became separated from its parent unit and continued attacking north. At the same time, C Co and the Reconnaissance Platoon received mortar and M-79 fire.

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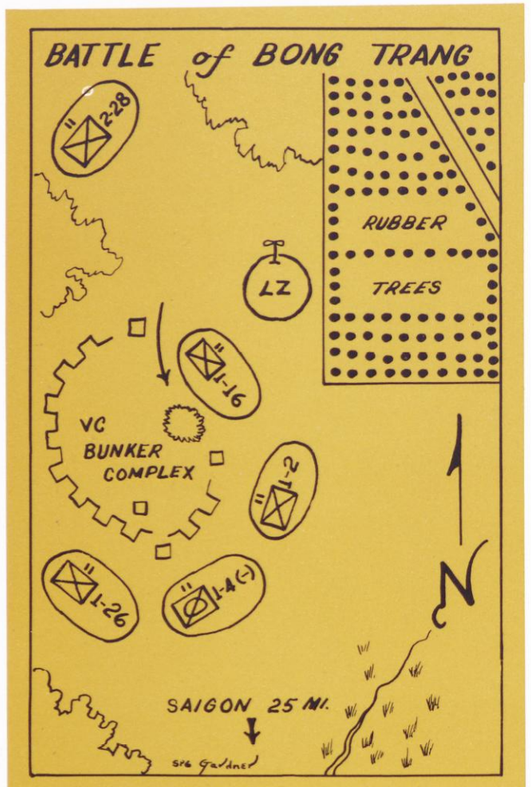


Key to Map Symbols Appears on Page 40.

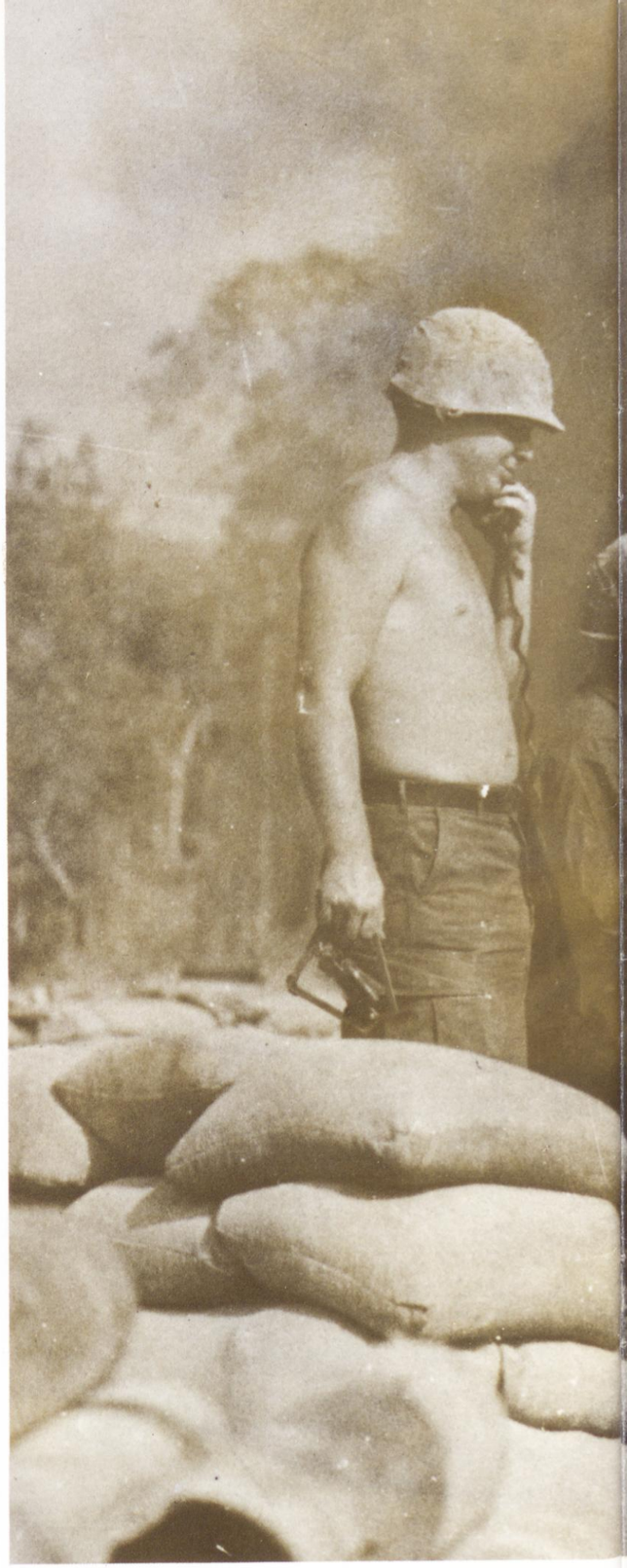
B Co, on the west, moved north with very light resistance until it was halted by heavy automatic weapons fire from the trees as well as mortar fire. The company made a series of assaults, each one becoming weaker as men were hit or separated—the last attempt being made by 14 men.

At 1730 hours the commander of the 1st Bn, 26th Inf, Lieutenant Colonel Gorman, Annandale, Va., was placed in command of all units engaged in the battle area. (For his outstanding performance during the battle, Colonel Gorman was later presented the Distinguished Service Cross by President Lyndon B. Johnson in a ceremony at Cam Ranh Bay.)

As darkness fell, the units were pulled back into night defensive positions. At 1915 hours the enemy, encircled by the 1/26 Inf, the 1/2 Inf, the 1/16 Inf and the 2/28 Inf, was pounded by airstrikes and artillery fire. A flare ship lit up the area through the night to restrict enemy movement.

At 0700 hours, 26 Aug, a pre-planned airstrike was made in the forward battle area. At 0800 hours the remaining seven members of the original patrol from the 1/2 Inf came out of the jungle and into the LZ. They had spent the night in a VC tunnel. Private First Class Dennis Peterson, Westminster, Calif., the only man not wounded, had cared for the other men throughout the day and right, finally leading them to safety. He was later awarded the Silver Star Medal for his heroism. At 0845 hours the 2/28 Inf replaced the heavily hit 1/2 Inf, which was returned to Phuoc Vinh. The remaining battalions in the battle area linked up and swept the field.

A total of 171 Viet Cong were killed in action, during the action of 25, 26 and 27 Aug. The Phu Loi Battalion had been literally cut in half. US casualties were 30 killed and 183 wounded.



SP4 Joe Connor

As darkness fell on 25 Aug., the Viet Cong were pounded by artillery guns. A flare ship lit up the area through the night to restrict enemy movement. In his after-action report, COL Berry gave much credit to the destruction of the Phu Loi Battalion to the 1st Battalion, 5th Artillery. The artillery battalion was under the command of MAJ David C. Rogers.

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U.S. Air Force Photo

During the heat of battle, airstrikes were called in to block the VC *escape.*

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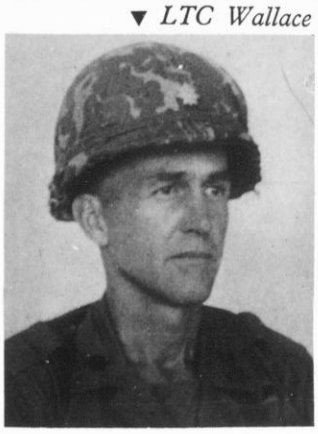
COL Berry ▼

LTC Gorman ▼

▼ *LTC Wallace*

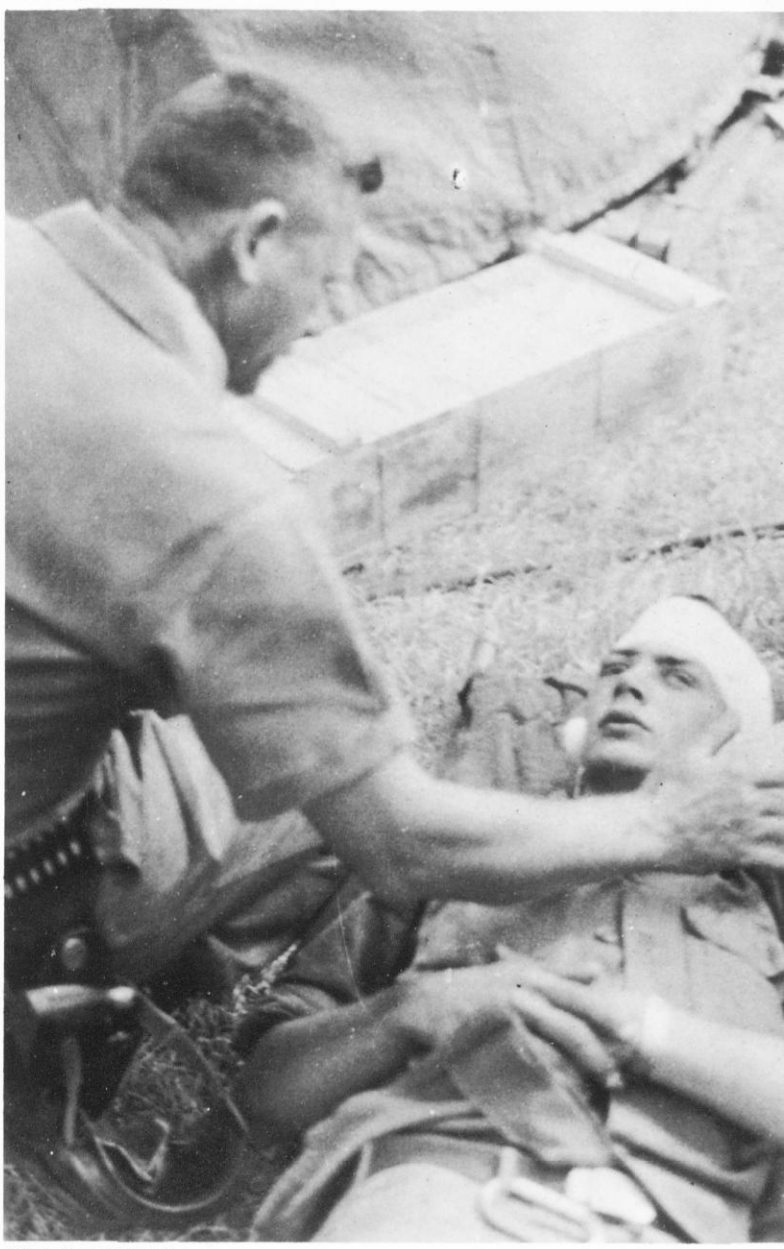


Battle Of Bong Trang Commanders

CPT Mullen ▼

LTC Pendleton ▼

BG James F. Hollingsworth, Assistant Division Commander, talks with a wounded BIG RED ONE *soldier during the* BATTLE OF BONG TRANG. ▼



121st Signal Battalion

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SP4 Phil Stitt

"Dust Off" Arrives: A casualty is hurried towards a waiting "dust off" helicopter. ▲

◀

During the Battle of Bong Trang, the jungle can be seen burning after artillery pounding and air strikes. This Photograph was taken from a HU1B helicopter by SSG Gerard F. Forken.

BIG RED ONE *soldiers take a break during lull in 25 Aug. battle.* ▼

SP4 Phil Stitt

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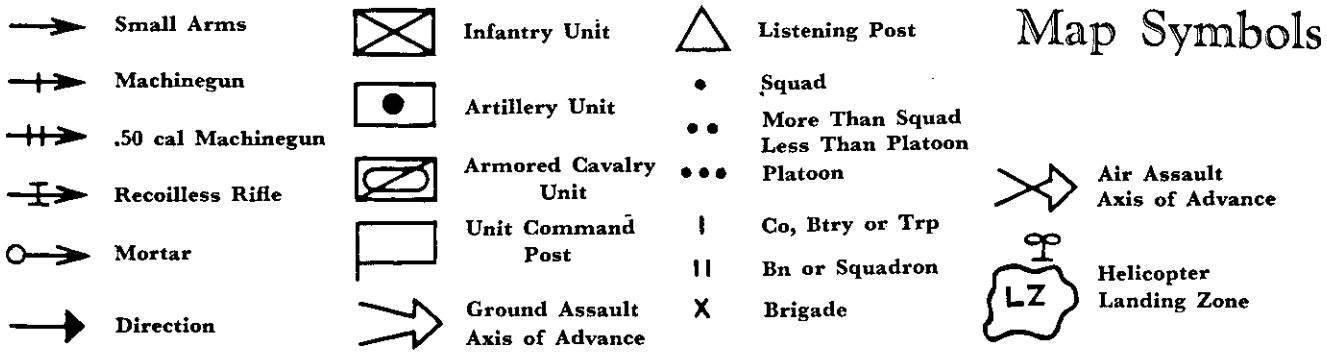
STATISTICS SUMMARY

BATTLES	UNITS INVOLVED	US COMMANDERS	ENEMY KIA*
Ap Tau O (8 Jun 66) *Story on Page 2*	A Trp, 1/4 Cav 2/18 Inf **US** 3/9 ARVN Div Arty **VC** 272d VC Regt	1/4 Cav — LTC Leonard L. Lewane 2/18 Inf — LTC Herbet McChrystal Div Arty — COL Marlin W. Camp	93
Loc Ninh Plantation (11 Jun 66) *Story on Page 5*	2/28 Inf **US** 2 CIDG Companies Div Arty **VC** 273d VC Regt C2311 AY Co	2/28 Inf — LTC Kyle W. Bowie Div Arty — COL Marlin W. Camp	98
Srok Dong (30 June 66) *Page 9*	1/4 Cav (-) **US** 2/18 Inf Div Arty **VC** 3/271st VC Regt Z43 Arty Bn	1/4 Cav — LTC Leonard L. Lewane 2/18 Inf — LTC Herbert McChrystal Div Arty — COL Marlin W. Camp	270
Ho Krignou (1–2 July 66) *Story on Page 16*	2/18 Inf **US** 1/28 Inf Div Arty **VC** 273d VC Regt	2/18 Inf — LTC Herbert McChrystal 1/28 Inf — LTC Robert Haldane Div Arty — COL Marlin W. Camp	78
Minh Thanh Road (9 July 66) *Story on Page 23*	1/4 Cav 1/16 Inf 1/2 Inf **US** 1/18 Inf 1/28 Inf 8/6 Arty 1/5 Arty 1/33 Arty 1/7 Arty **VC** 272d VC Regt	1/4 Cav — LTC Leonard L. Lewane 1/16 Inf — LTC Rufus C. Lazzell LTC George M. Wallace III 1/2 Inf — LTC Richard Prillaman 1/18 Inf — MAJ John C. Bard 1/28 Inf — LTC Robert Haldane 8/6 Arty — LTC John R. McGiffert 1/5 Arty — MAJ David C. Rogers 1/33 Arty — LTC Frank R. Tims 1/7 Arty — LTC John H. Fye III	238
Bong Trang (25 Aug 66) *Story on Page 31*	1/2 Inf A&C Trps, 1/4 Cav 1/16 Inf 1/26 Inf 2/28 Inf 1/5 Arty 1st Engr Bn **VC** Phu Loi Bn C62 Company	1/2 Inf — LTC Richard Prillaman 1/4 Cav — LTC Leonard L. Lewane 1/16 Inf — LTC George M. Wallace III 1/26 Inf — LTC Paul F. Gorman 2/28 Inf — LTC Elmer D. Pendleton 1/5 Arty — MAJ David C. Rogers 1st Engr Bn — LTC Joseph M. Kiernan Jr.	171 *KIA — Killed *In Action,*

Map Symbols



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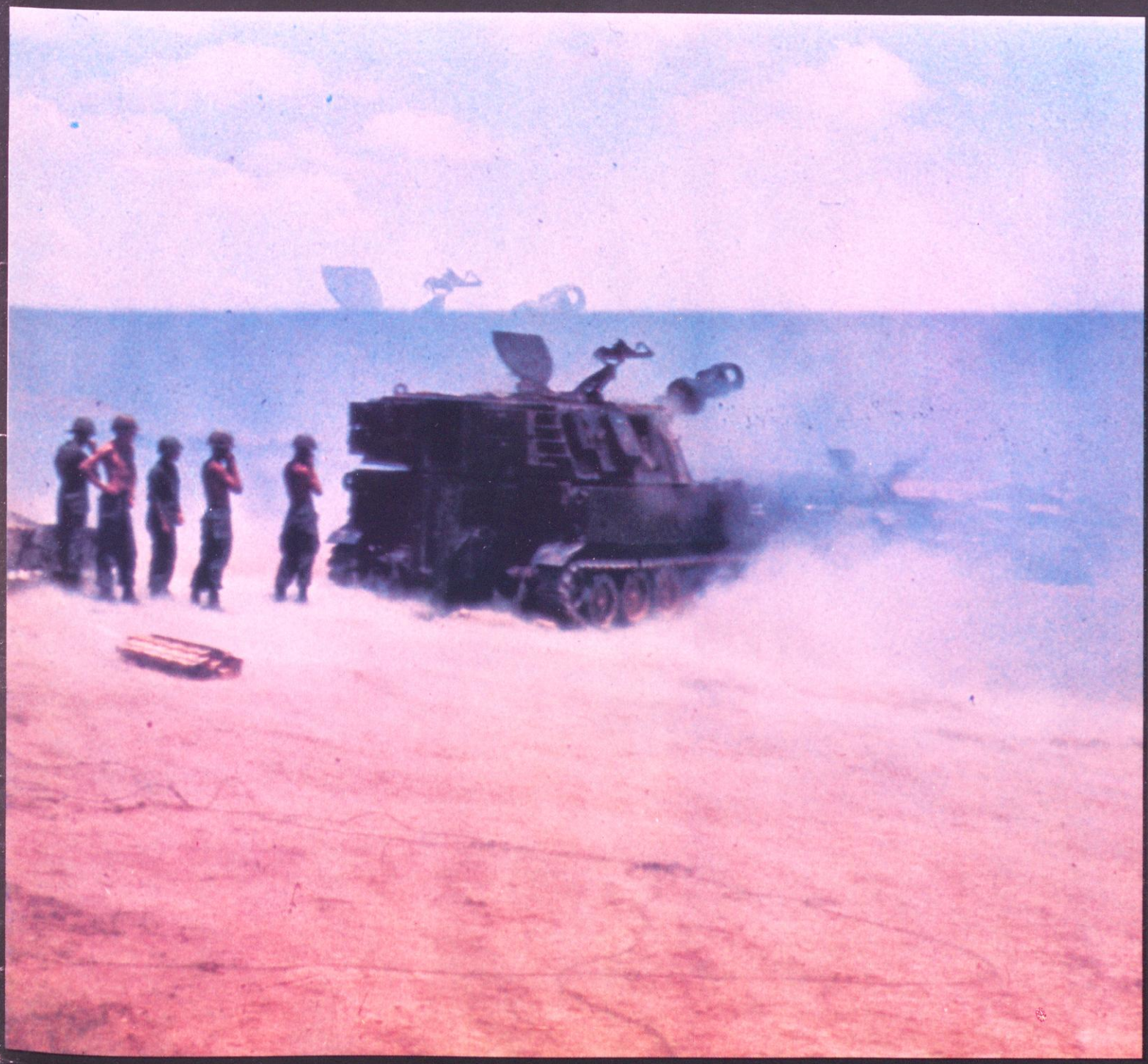

SFC Frank P. Castro

"... We have greater mobility and firepower, we have more endurance and more to fight for.... And we've got more guts."

GEN William C. Westmoreland
COMMANDER
MACV-1967

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